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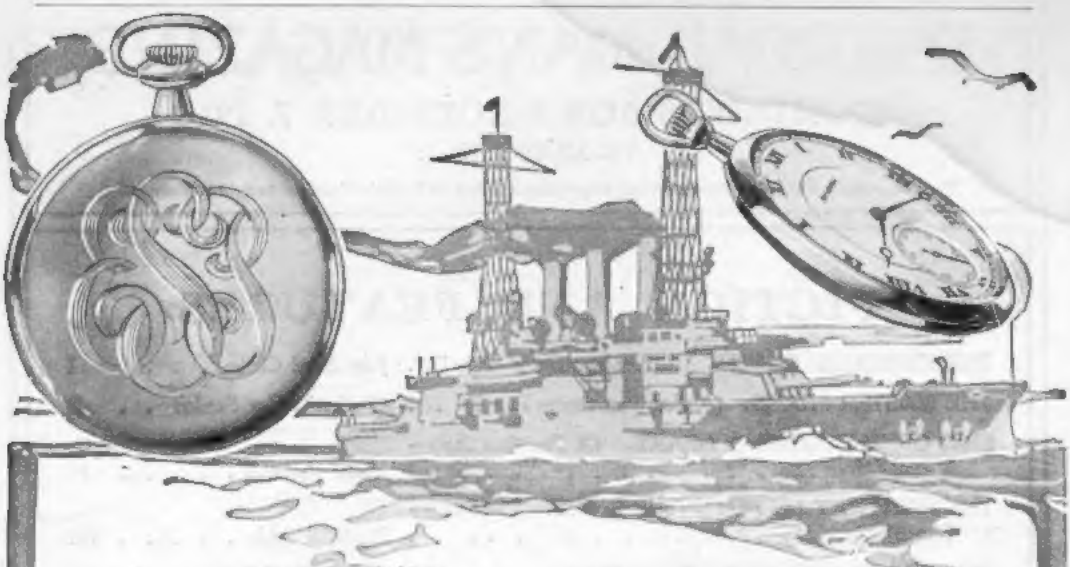

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# RAILROAD MAN'S MAGAZINE

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Vol. XXXIX. No. 1.

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FRANK A. MUNSEY, President RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Secretary CHRISTOPHER H. POPE, Treasurer

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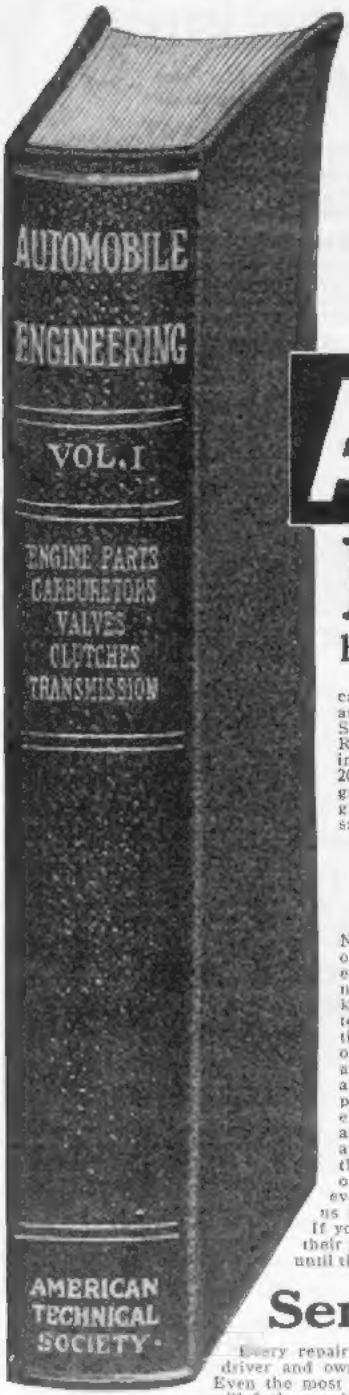

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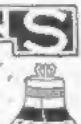

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# RAILROAD MAN'S MAGAZINE

DECEMBER 7, 1918.

Vol. XXXIX. No. 1.


# THE FINGER OF DEATH.


BY JOHN BOYD CLARKE,

Author of "The Locked Door," "Broadname Whispers," etc.


A FIVE-PART STORY—PART ONE.

## CHAPTER I.

### A GIRL AND A LIGHTNING BOLT.

STOVER CONNORTON boarded the bus at the roadside, carrying his black specimen box and camera, and his collapsible net; for he was by way of being something of an entomologist as well as a dabbler in other branches of science

The big drops were already splashing into the road dust and the roll of the thunder drums drew steadily nearer. Upon the mass of black cloud-shapes piled in the west were drawn now and then pencil-strokes of livid lightning.

When Connorton had crowded past a fat man's knees and a lady of color with a hamper of wash on her capacious lap, the starting of the bus plumped him incontinently into the seat next to a young woman who attracted his second glance and then held his attention altogether.

He was suddenly glad he had been driven to board this particular bus by the downpour which had now arrived.

The bus crossed to one of the ancient bridges over the swampy river—a wooden structure with a draw that revolved. The rain-drenched highway was deserted save for the jitney and a heavy motor truck piled high with boxes stenciled "United Can Company." This motor truck had right of way as it rumbled upon the bridge.

A Federal tug, imperative in the sound of its whistle, was blowing for the draw to open. The driver of the bus could have turned out and scurried past the slower truck and so cleared the draw, had it not been for the excitement of the recreant bridge tender

This man dropped the gates and signaled the truck and jitney to halt midway of the draw while he started the machinery that swung the middle span.

As the draw swung out over the turgid stream there came the crash of a lightning bolt directly over the heads of the passengers in the stalled bus

A certain blue mist enveloped them. A sulfurous odor stung their nostrils. The washerwoman screamed raucously and wedged the fat man into his seat with her basket while she plowed out at the rear.

Until Connorton got out he had little idea as to just what had happened. Flames were darting down upon the roof of the munitions truck. The scorched canvas was already beginning to smoke.

It was the frenzied shriek of the motor truck driver that warned them all of menacing peril. The panic-stricken fellow had no idea of cranking up. He ran.

Connorton was already leading the girl toward the rear of the swinging draw. The oiled wood of which the cases on the truck were made burned like tinder. The dropping flakes of fire from the smoke-incrusted beams of the bridge seemed fiendishly determined to reach the heart of the heaped explosives.

The first shell went off—shooting over the river with a burst of sound that startled the flat echoes of the swamp.

The other passengers of the bus were following the panic-stricken truck-driver toward the front of the draw. The tug was steering through the open strait. The bridge tender, having locked his lever, stopping the draw in midstream, leaped from the window of his hut, and the crew of the tug fished him out while the group at the head of the span shrieked for rescue

Connorton and the girl, alone at the other end, were quite aware of what was coming. He seized his companion and swung her over the river, lowering her to a secure foothold upon a stringpiece.

There were three more explosions in rapid succession. Connorton, over his shoulder, saw the jitney torn to pieces by one of these shells

He dropped, too, from the end of the platform and seized the girl about the waist. It must have been intuition that caused him to leap instantly with her into the swirling tide below.

As they plunged in, the truck-load of shells went off with an explosion that seemed to rock heaven and earth'

When the two came up the bridge was all afire. Its upper frame was torn into a grotesque fretwork of splintered and twisted timbers, plainly limned up by the flames. Connorton struck out for the eastern shore, bearing the girl up with one hand. She was plucky; she did not attempt to struggle, although he was quite sure she could not swim.

A boatman sighted the pair and paddled out to them. Otherwise Connorton would have been sharply put to it to drag the girl out of the flood

Her eyes opened as she was drawn into the boat and her gaze rested upon his face. She smiled. When Connorton swarmed over the stern with the ease of the practised boatman, she spoke for the first time: "Oh, I did not think we would make it!"

"We're all right now," the student managed to say between his gasps for breath. "I'll get you home as soon as I can find a car."

He drew forth a small and pulpy roll of bills and peeled off one for the boatman When the skiff's nose bumped into the bank he gave the girl his hand and gallantly helped her ashore.

She looked at him straightly as he drew her up to a secure footing and Stover Connorton thought within himself that a fellow must have a pretty clear conscience to meet that look. That single, searching glance seemed to put her valuation upon him for all time

"I fancy my cards are much too wet to be usable," he laughed, and told her his name.

"Mine is Driggs—Millicent Driggs," she said gently.

They climbed to the roadside, where there was a string of automobiles already gathered. Connorton led the girl toward an empty car which he was confident might be hired. Near by he noted the presence of a powerful green touring automobile and he saw that the girl's attention was immediately fixed upon the occupants of this vehicle

One was a burly, curly haired, smoothly shaven man of such dominant presence that he would have been marked in any crowd. As he stared off across the stream through the now thinning smoke of the burning bridge, his colossuslike attitude seemed an advertisement for what his character must be, although he did nothing more in the emergency than the inept throng of curiosity mongers. Connorton was smitten with the thought that the man might do anything, had he so determined. His face was a

mask without any expression save that of passive strength. Yet one felt that he had a deep interest in the scene of havoc and in the efforts—now successful—of the tug's crew in rescuing those remaining on the burning bridge.

With the big man in the tonneau of the green car was a lady, beautifully dressed and closely veiled in white chiffon. But Miss Driggs seemed more interested in the man. She shuddered. Was it with sudden cold, nervousness, or apprehension?

"That is Gordon Brayne," she whispered to Connorton.

"Indeed? I never saw him close-up before," admitted the student. "They have recently bought a summer home up Quehawket way, where my Aunt Regina lives. He must be personally interested in this accident. The United Can Company is one of his many concerns. Quite a wonderful man, Gordon Brayne."

They had escaped any police interference and Connorton hoped to get the girl away before they were questioned. The chap behind the wheel of the automobile he had picked out was willing.

"Hop in," he said. "I'll take you to the Hundred and Thirtieth Street Ferry in short order."

Connorton looked at his companion and she nodded. They got in.

"Shall I put up my top again?" asked the chauffeur.

"Don't wait for that," begged Miss Driggs

It was fully a minute, and after he had wrapped some robes about her, that Connorton realized why she was in such haste. The girl continued to gaze covertly at the car in which Gordon Brayne stood. The latter turned to scrutinize the refugees.

"Oh! Hurry! Hurry!" she begged.

Brayne waved a signaling arm; but Connorton studiously turned his face away and the chauffeur did not see. They started.

"Hit it up, old man—as speedily as the law allows," the student advised.

Yet he very well knew that if Gordon Brayne wished to interview them that high-powered green car would easily overtake this flivver. Indeed, before they had gone a mile he heard the touring car coming.

Millicent Driggs, well covered by the robes, did not apprehend pursuit. She only uttered commonplaces; but Connorton flattered himself that she was secretly studying him. Her friendliness increased.

"I hope I am not taking you out of your way, Mr. Connorton?" she said.

He told her where he lived in New York and she smiled again. "It is not so far from where I live with my parents," she said frankly.

"This is sure my lucky day," he observed with emphasis.

"Lucky?"

"Sure. Your living so near me caps my good fortune. Why, I didn't know there was a girl like you in all New York."

She looked at him with questioning brows for a moment and then blushed faintly. Before she could reply to his bold speech the green car shot alongside their flivver. Millicent Driggs uttered a half-stifled cry and flung herself behind Connorton's bulk.

"Hey!" hailed Gordon Brayne, leaning forward to speak across the veiled lady by his side. "I want a word with you, sir."

Both chauffeurs slowed down and stopped, the cars side by side.

"You and the young lady were on that bridge when the explosion occurred?" asked Gordon Brayne. "Did everybody escape?"

The question was coolly spoken, but Connorton had a feeling that the lady's attitude was tense and excited. He saw, too, that she watched him closely from behind the swathing veils.

"I am not so sure of that," the student said. "We were passengers of the bus. It was blown to pieces before the big blow-off, you know."

"I do *not* know," the big man said.

At close view the student thought him even more interesting. A wonderful calm controlled the multimillionaire's countenance; yet there was nothing stolid about its expression.

"I would like your version of the accident, Mr. –" pursued Brayne.

"Connorton—Stover Connorton."

He apprehended on the instant a quick glance between Brayne and the lady beside him. He realized that they recognized his name and he added:

"My aunt owns Elmscroft, near your summer place, Mr. Brayne."

"You know who I am, then, Mr. Connorton?"

"In this case I fear you may be 'the man who pays.' The United Can Company will be a fair mark for damage suits; and you own the can company."

"I am its president," acknowledged the millionaire. "Whether my company is mulcted for damages remains to be seen. Tell me what you know about the explosion," he reurged

The student related the accident as it had occurred. He saw the tense figure of the veiled lady gradually relax and she sank against the upholstery of the seat-back. Her sigh of relief was audible as Connorton finished.

Brayne had not looked at her during Connorton's recital; but the latter saw the multimillionaire's big hand find and press hers comfortingly.

"Contributory negligence upon the part of the truck-driver is all that they can put on us, then," the big man said thoughtfully.

"What about the bridge tender?" Connorton asked. "We had no business on that draw when it was open. Besides, had the fellow stuck to his post and closed the draw after the tug went through, the jitney might have got away."

"Good points," acknowledged Brayne, with a more intent look into Connorton's face. "I'll mention them to my lawyers. What is your business? You have a quick mind." Then he added, in quite another tone: "You—and the young lady—may have a claim for damages as well."

"Don't lose any sleep over that in my case," the student said. "I lost nothing but a specimen box and camera outfit. I was browsing about the hillside yonder for the larvæ of the hawk-moth. Nothing in my kit that cannot easily be replaced."

He felt Miss Driggs tugging at his coat-sleeve and knew she wished they might get away without further questioning.

"And the young lady?" Brayne suggested, urgently.

"Wishes to be counted out of it. You can find me if you desire," the student said.

The lady in the green car leaned forward, trying to spy upon the girl hidden behind Connorton's shoulder. Her curiosity regarding Miss Driggs was evident.

Connorton asked the chauffeur to start. As the chap got out to crank up the student caught a glance which passed between the millionaire and his own chauffeur The latter spoke in a low tone to the driver of the jitney, who nodded.

"Good day, sir," Connorton said to Brayne, and bowed ceremoniously to the veiled lady. The flivver started and Millicent Driggs uttered a sigh of relief.

"I am sorry," he told her gently. "If you wish to remain unknown to Gordon Brayne we shall have to dismiss this fellow at the ferry, take the boat across without him, and find a conveyance of some kind on the New York side This man has promised to report your address to Brayne's chauffeur"

"Oh!"

"Yes. I'm a lip-reader," Connorton said. "I have an ancient aunt, my single living relative, who is stone deaf. We converse together soundlessly. Indeed she brought me up almost as a mute. Her home at Elmscroft is a 'house of silence.' Even her servants must be mute."

"How odd!" the girl cried, her interest growing. "But Mr. Connorton, can we escape this fellow?"

"Leave it to me," said the student with assurance. "I will pay and dismiss him at the ferry."

And he did so

On the New York side it was an ancient two-wheeler, drawn by a bony horse and driven by a beery, leering jehu, that picked them up and finally deposited the new comrades in adventure at Millicent's door. By that time they had become very well acquainted indeed.

"I—I cannot ask you in just now, Mr Connorton," the girl said, flushing softly "My mother is an invalid and I must explain my condition without arousing her alarm. If you will call some evening—"

"To-morrow night," declared this very prompt and decisive young man, and he was right on the minute in keeping the appointment

People of moderate financial circumstances lived in the apartment and on the block. Harlem has a thousand blocks like it. There was nothing distinctive about the neighborhood.

Save the girl herself. When he saw her on the step, evidently waiting for him, it seemed to Connorton that she would grace any neighborhood in the city.

Not that she was strikingly or even richly dressed. But there was, beside her dark beauty, a distinction—an *air*- about Millicent Driggs that marked her, the student felt, above other girls.

"I thought you might like to walk, Mr. Connorton, it is such a lovely evening," she said, flushing as he held her hand for a moment.

"Surely. Whatever is your pleasure. Only we *must* talk."

"Suppose—the park?"

"Fine," he agreed cheerfully.

The possibility that she wished to postpone his introduction to her folks caused him but small chagrin at the moment. But after he had met her several times—and she seemed willing enough to spend her evenings in his company—this fact began to rasp his mind.

Always something seemed to intervene Her home life was closed to him.

Meanwhile Connorton had been in attendance twice at the coroner's inquest held upon the explosion of the munitions truck and the wreck of the drawbridge. Two men had lost their lives. There would be damage suits growing out of the accident.

"Yet if ever a catastrophe was brought about by 'an act of Providence,'" he told Millicent, "it was so in this case. But I believe Gordon Brayne was anxious about it until the verdict. It did not seem as though it was just the money end that troubled him. By the way, Mrs. Brayne—you are sure that was she with him in the car?"

"I suppose so," Millicent said rather absently.

"Well, the same woman, anyway, and all enveloped in veils, was at the inquest each day I was there, listening with a deadly earnestness that I couldn't understand."

"They say she is a very lovely woman."

"Indeed?" Connorton looked at her as though he could state under oath if need be just where there was to be found a far lovelier one than Mrs. Brayne.

Brayne had spoken to the student and advised him to call at his office. But he told Millicent nothing about that. The girl did not seem to care to talk of the Braynes, while on his part he found himself vastly interested in both the multimillionaire and the "veiled lady."

Connorton did tell the girl, however, much about himself. About his Aunt Regina particularly, who, since his tenth year, when his parents had died of fever in a southern city, had taken sole care of him.

"Of course, she is peculiar. Her idea of a man's needs and desires are tempered by her knowledge of the tastes of old Abram Kovil, who has been her gardener for twenty years," said Connorton on one occasion.

"She thinks I need no more money now than I did when I was a kid in knickerbockers. If my father had not left me a small nest-egg from which I derive some income that aunty has forgotten all about, I might sometimes find the old brier empty and other luxuries would be *nil*."

"But- but don't you work?" Millicent asked him.

"Bless you, yes. I'm never idle. And I shall do a bit some day to astonish my friends. But Aunty Regina would be horrified if she knew I ever did anything for money.

"You see, she is ridiculously rich and there really is nobody else to be her heir. If she were a bit more liberal in the matter of pocket money I'd never have a worry in the world."

She looked at him with strange intentness. "I come of people who have always had to work, Mr. Connorton," she said.

## CHAPTER II.

### ENDERLY DRIGGS AT HOME.

CONNORTON was a patient fellow; and he believed, too, that the mystery surrounding Millicent's home life was quite an innocent mystery.

She had told him there were only her mother and father and herself in the family; so it could not be that there was a black-sheep brother to shield. Or was it the father?

He learned casually that Mr Enderly Driggs was almost always at home; his employment, therefore, could not be of much value to the family exchequer. Personal queries—other than about herself—Millicent thwarted. And, of course, Connorton could not come right out "flat-footed" and ask her what the difficulty was!

There came an evening, however, when a sudden shower began to pelt the steaming city pavements just before he reached Millicent's abode. "A thunder-storm seems to bring me good luck," Connorton told himself blithely. "See what that one did for me the other day."

No. She was not at the street door as usual when he was scheduled to call. Evidently she did not expect him in this downpour.

Connorton displayed wisdom. There was a householder just entering. The caller only appeared to push the Driggs's button and walked boldly in after this other man.

He already knew that Millicent lived in a third-floor apartment. He ran up the two flights and beat a light summons upon the door.

Almost instantly it opened and the girl her gaze a trifle startled peered out at him. "Mr. Connorton! And in all this rain?"

"You should have discovered by this time that I'm neither sugar nor salt," he said gaily.

"Why—come in, do!" and the invitation was not without a spontaneity that secretly delighted the caller. "We surely cannot venture out anywhere in this rain."

He continued to beam his satisfaction as he stepped within the narrow hall. Then there could be no deep-seated reason why she had not invited him in before.

"Come and meet my mother," she said. "Father is not at home to-night." She flung back a portière and ushered him into the cramped little parlor, typical of the Harlem flat. "Mother! here is the young man whom you must thank for saving your daughter's life."

A frail little woman in a cushioned chair dark and all in yellow—met the visitor's frank gaze. She did not rise but gave Connorton a warm hand

"I feel we can never thank you enough for *that*," Mrs. Driggs said, earnestly "Without Milly we should be lost -quite lost"

There was a heartiness in her welcome that could not be misunderstood. They sat down and talked just as freely and en joyably as Connorton and the girl did when they were alone together. Mrs. Driggs was no soporific, invalid though she was. As for Millicent, she scintillated sparkled. The glow in her cheeks, the light in her eyes, her gaiety and lightness of spirit charmed the young man utterly.

She had heretofore been quite unresponsive to any of his tender advances. Nor was he a bold youth. Connorton felt now that, under the protection of her mother's presence, the girl was not afraid to show him how good a friend she considered him.

Then the door-latch clicked. Millicent sat upright suddenly and with a listening air. The joy fled his face; her ease of manner vanished. Mrs. Driggs continued talking with Connorton; but he watched the girl's strained countenance. Millicent half whispered:

"Oh! is it so late? Ten o'clock? I would not have believed it."

Curiosity gnawed at the young man's mind like a hungry dog at a bone. Millicent's words could have but a single meaning. She hoped her visitor would immediately close his call. But Connorton was determined to remain

Not that he doubted the girl's honesty in any particular; but he wished to get to the bottom of the mystery and that at once. If it was the father

There was a sigh from the doorway where the portière was but half drawn. Connorton glanced quickly in that direction, quite losing the thread of what Mrs. Driggs was saying.

A man stood there; a meek, pasty-faced little man with a wisp of side whisker, a smoothly-shaven lip, and the weakest of

chins. He was dressed in shabby black and the expression of his face was just as virile as that of the clock on the mantel! A more inconsequential-looking, harmless man Stover Connorton had never seen in the course of his young life.

"Come in, father," Mrs. Driggs said kindly. "This is Mr. Connorton Milly's friend."

The little man shuffled forward. When Connorton stood up to greet him with a handshake, he towered over Mr. Driggs like a giant. Mr. Driggs presented the visitor with a hand like a dead fish.

"Milly's friend? Tut, tut!" said Enderly Driggs. Then he found himself a retired chair and sat down

Fiery spots burned in the girl's cheeks. Her gaze was downcast and she had nothing to say. Connorton wondered, for her mother seemed placidly trying to draw her husband into the conversation.

"Mr. Connorton saved Milly from drowning that day she was on the bridge that was blown up, father."

"It was blown up? Tut, tut!" murmured Enderly Driggs.

"She was providentially spared to us," the invalid pursued. "We have much to thank Mr. Connorton for."

The little man bowed to the visitor. His lips formed a silent "Thank-you," possibly a "Tut, tut!" likewise. Connorton broke in cheerfully, trying to mend matters.

"Had anything serious happened to your daughter, Mr. Driggs, I am sure even Gordon Brayne's money could not have repaid you."

He heard Millicent utter a half-stifled exclamation. Even the invalid moved restlessly in her chair. But Connorton's attention was instantly fixed by the change that came over Enderly Driggs's features and altered his manner.

Color came into his pasty cheeks and his weak eyes brightened. A dead man awakening to life again could have gone through no more complete metamorphosis.

"Gordon Brayne," he said in a stronger voice. "Tut, tut! I have been on his payroll for years—and I worked for his uncle before him. Old Peter Gordon Brayne. A bigger man, he, than young Gordon will ever be. Tut, tut! I've a small opinion of Gordon Brayne."

"Father!" murmured Millicent.

"Yes," the old man said unctuously. "Gordon Brayne could scarcely get on without me Tut, tut! Not at all."

Mrs. Driggs tried to stem the tide, too, of his monologue. But once launched on this topic, Enderly Driggs was not so easily halted.

"Tut, tut! These millionaires," he said confidentially to Connorton, "are tricky fellows to handle. But once get at their secrets and you can tame them—yes, sir. You'll have them eating out of your hand then."

"Father!" again cried Millicent.

"But you couldn't handle old P. G. Brayne. No. But then, nobody ever got at his secrets. Young Gordon—"

"Did you have a pleasant evening at Joe's, father?" interrupted Mrs. Driggs.

Enderly Driggs gave her not the slightest attention, but rambled on.

"Gordon Brayne knows on which side his bread's buttered. Tut, tut! Yes, indeed. Does he ever refuse me anything? Never. He doesn't dare. I walk into his private office with more freedom than the biggest men on the Street. He doesn't dare put down Enderly Driggs. 'Driggs knows too much; he is too necessary to me, Driggs is.' That is what Gordon Brayne says. Even that snake-in-the-grass, Mole—"

"Father! Don't get so excited—please. Remember the doctor's warning. Your heart -" Milicent's tone was so imploring that Connorton could not refrain from coming himself to the rescue.

"Yes, yes, Mr. Driggs. Quite so," he said, rising and giving the babbling one his hand. It's all very interesting; but I'm obliged to go now. Half after ten? I had no idea it was so late. Good night!"

His hand then closed upon the invalid's frail fingers. "Come again, Mr. Connorton. Don't mind him," she whispered.

"I shall be delighted," he declared.

Millicent, all red, and with eyes bedewed with tears, waited for him at the door.

"Don't mind," Connorton whispered in her ear. "It's all right."

"Oh, if he only wouldn't!" gasped the girl. "He goes on that way if ever Mr Brayne's name is mentioned. Suppose suppose Mr. Brayne should hear of it?"

"Well what of it?"

"It—it—oh, Mr. Connorton!" sobbed the girl, "it might cost us our living. And I can scarcely leave mother to go to work You can see that father is able to do little toward our support. He has been this way for years. And all the time Mr. Brayne's kindness has supported us."

The story came all at this single outburst. The mystery that had puzzled Stover Connorton was now quite revealed.

"Your father is a pensioner of Mr. Brayne?"

"Ye-es. Something happened, ten years and more ago, in Mr. Brayne's office. My father had been a clerk there for years. I think he was quite worn out with work and worry in the service of old Mr. Brayne The old gentleman had just died, I believe, and Mr. Gordon Brayne had stepped into his place.

"However, what it was that happened—I was too small at the time to understand and my mother will not speak of it if she knows—came near to unbalancing father's mind. You can see he is not right.

"He was unable to do his work in the office after that illness. So Mr. Brayne gave him his freedom and he only reports at the office weekly to draw his salary—the same that he received before the trouble. Otherwise I do not see how we could have lived all these years, with mother so ill as she is at times.

"If Mr. Brayne should become offended and should cease being kind

"Now you see why I shrank from having him know the other day who I was. I I fear to come in contact with Gordon Brayne. And yet, he is our sole benefactor."

"Well, well!" said the student, comfortingly. "Don't let it worry you as far as I am concerned. Of course, whatever your father happens to say to me about Mr. Brayne will go no further. And I shall eschew the subject another time. No harm can come of it. You are overanxious, Miss Millicent."

"Do you think so?" If she was not convinced she was comforted

## CHAPTER III.

### ENDERLY DRIGGS ABROAD

MR. ENDERLY DRIGGS in his apparel was neatness itself. His shabby garments were always brushed speckless. His creaking boots—proclaiming their nominal cost in the unmistakable terms of "cheap! cheap!" as he walked never lacked a polish. His turned and frayed collar and cuffs were white.

Indeed, Mr. Driggs went forth, the ruin of a well-dressed man, for he proclaimed to his family that there was no money to spare for the mere adornment of person

Which was quite true. For as household and all other living expenses had advanced during these ten years in which he had been a pensioner, and his weekly stipend from the millionaire had not advanced by so much as a tittle—whatever amount that may be—the Driggs family found it sometimes difficult to get along.

It was true that because of the exactions of her mother's physical condition, Millicent could not go steadily to work as other girls did. She made her own clothes and trimmed her hats, and with a natural taste above the average she managed to make herself look in the mode. Nobody knew—no mere man like Stover Connorton could imagine—what it cost her in pains and striving to do this.

Nor could she neglect her mother's apparel. Mrs. Driggs had been a dressy little woman in her youth; she would have been unhappy were she deprived of pretty wrappers and house-dresses.

The family, in fact, lived in a shabby backwater of respectability that wears the soul more threadbare than does frank poverty. And the scheming and arranging, the making of each dollar an elastic form of currency which must stretch to do the work of two, was the burden upon Millicent's mind. Mrs. Driggs had never properly assumed this burden, and it was plain her husband's mind was not equal to such a task.

"Tut, tut!" said Enderly Driggs on Friday after luncheon, "it is time I was at the office."

So he set his speckless, if ancient, hat upon his head, took his battered stick, and ambled forth, as harmless a little old gentleman as one might ever see about the streets of New York.

He went down-town in the subway and got out of that into the tunnel that led under the Mirrivale Building in which were the offices of the Brayne Operating Company.

A dozen elevators transported workers and visitors from the central hall of the great structure to the various floors and suites of offices. But Enderly Driggs slipped up a side stairway and so reached the ground floor and a small hall, out of which a door opened on the side street. There was a plainly furnished anteroom next this hall which might have been an office of the superintendent of the building, or of the engineer, but was not.

Driggs stepped confidently into this room and addressed himself to a rather narrow door, scarcely noticeable in the paneling of the wall. It might have been the door of a clothes-closet or the like. When opened, however, the cage of a small elevator was revealed

The grilled door of the car could be opened easily by one who knew the trick of it. Mr Driggs stepped within, and on closing both doors, started the car with his left hand upon the knob of a sliding switch.

The car was softly lighted from a globe in the roof of it. It glided upward as smoothly as such a mechanism could be made to work. At the sixth floor it stopped of itself, for that was as high as the shaft went

The old clerk opened the grated door and slid back the panel in the wall. He stepped directly into the private office of Gordon Brayne, the multimillionaire of whose secrets he had bragged to Stover Connorton he was possessed.

It was a huge apartment in the principal corner of the building, overlooking both streets. From without these corner windows of the sixth and seventh floors appear just like the windows of the other floors.

Old P. G. Brayne's money had paid for the construction of this building, and this suite of offices had been built to his order. The great apartment into which Enderly Driggs stepped was two stories high. The two sets of windows flooded the place with light; but that light was toned to a grateful quality by colored glass as though the office were a cathedral

Along the windowless side and end of the vast room, at the level of the seventh floor, a balcony was built upon which the doors of minor offices opened, and from which a stairway curved downward to the floor-level of the private office of the millionaire.

Toward the farther end of the room as Driggs entered from the private elevator was set a massive desk in the middle of the floor a desk that had been built for the elder Brayne and fastened in its place when the offices were originally furnished.

A deep red carpet of heavy pile covered the floor and fitted closely all about this island of desk. Under the gallery and against the walls were file cabinets and bookcases. Aside from some settees and a few heavy chairs there were no other articles of furniture in the room save the huge desk.

At this Gordon Brayne and his secretaries worked. His heads of departments, or their assistants, came and went at his summons. Set into the polished surface of the desk and within reach of the millionaire's long arm, was a row of push-buttons.

One of these buttons was red.

Enderly Driggs approached the desk confidently, and his feet made no sound upon the thick carpet. Nor had the opening and closing of the fire-proof panel defending the elevator shaft produced more than a murmur of sound. Yet Mr. Brayne, sitting almost with his back to the shabby little man, said:

"Ah, Driggs! Is it you?"

In the center of the big desk stood an eight-square block of crystal upon an ebon stand. In the mirrorlike surfaces of this crystal Mr. Brayne saw reflected all parts of the great room.

"Prompt as usual, Driggs," the big man added kindly.

He worked without a coat, his shirt-

sleeves rolled back from hairy arms, and the open neck of the garment displaying an equally hairy chest. Arms and chest were as white as milk. Mr. Brayne was not an out-of-door man; yet he seemed in the pink of physical condition despite the absence of tan

It was a warm day and his black, close curls clung moistly to his brow. He had been working here since ten o'clock and it was now approaching three. Twice he had had a glass of milk and a sandwich brought in to him. He had not left his chair.

The wire baskets that littered the table were heaped with open letters that he had annotated. There was a pile of documents a foot high, signed and sealed, at his elbow. He had dictated letters and instructions to underlings sufficient to well fill the notebooks of two stenographers.

He worked like a well-oiled, perfectly adjusted machine. No waste effort; no wasted time. Even as he reached into a drawer for the manila envelope already prepared for Enderly Driggs and with the superannuated clerk's name upon it, his right hand reached for the row of push-buttons and he pressed the first one.

Almost at once a door opened at the head of the stairway on the balcony and a man came out and descended to the level of the desk-room. He was a slim man, almost as tall as Gordon Brayne himself (who was well over six feet) and his shock of hair was iron-gray. His closely shaven face revealed all the grimness of his thin lips and lean jaw.

The newcomer came with a sheaf of papers in his hand. He looked through a pince-nez at Enderly Driggs and scowled

"Whom have we here—the usual Friday pest?" he said with no attempt to lower his tone to a pitch that the superannuated clerk might not hear.

"Oh, Mr. Driggs does not forget us!" the millionaire said, cheerfully. "Come again, Driggs."

Enderly Driggs thrust the envelope into his pocket and turned with almost a snarl upon him who approached the desk.

"Ha! Moles work their way to the surface at times, don't they? There was a space when you took orders from me, eh? Who was Frederick Mole then? Not private secretary in Mr. P. G. Brayne's administration and never would have been."

The secretary's face was contorted by an emotion that boded ill for the babbling Driggs. But Brayne, looking only at the pensioner, said:

"Don't mind Mole, Mr. Driggs. His temper is soured by too much work and responsibility. And he refuses to take a vacation. But you and I understand each other."

"Oh, yes, Mr. Gordon. I understand you at least. Tut, tut! I should say I did," the old man chattered excitedly. "Who else should better understand you? Wasn't you once under me as well as Frederick Mole, Mr. Gordon? You were put forward by your uncle; but Mole would never have gained a step up as long as Mr. P. G. was alive. I wonder he did not turn in his grave—if he knew it. Tut, tut! Yes, indeed, I am the keeper of secrets, not this abominable, burrowing Mole. Tut, tut! I should say."

"That will do, Driggs," Brayne admonished the old man sharply.

"Tut, tut!" said the vain old pensioner, his dry chaps aflame with passion. "Take no high-and-mighty tone with me, Mr. Gordon Brayne. Remember I know too much about you and your doings. And this contemptible Mole—"

The private secretary uttered an oath and started around the table. The millionaire raised a commanding hand.

"Be still, Driggs, and go home!" he said. "Come, Mole; what are those papers?"

"Oh, you don't put me off so easily!" sputtered Driggs, yet withdrawing a yard or two from the desk. "I do not forget, if you do, Mr. Gordon. Remember what happened ten years ago—in this very office—with us three here, Mr. Gordon? Tut, tut! I do not forget."

Brayne swung half around in the chair and looked directly at the little man. Mole cursed Driggs again desperately, but under his breath.

"Oh, yes," pursued the ancient clerk. "I remember quite well enough. Oh, yes—tut, tut! Yes, indeed! Poor Sadie Phelps—"

"Be still!" thundered Brayne, suddenly bringing his clenched fist down upon the desk-top.

But the old clerk's courage now rode a hard-bitted steed. "Tut, tut!" he blustered, a veritable mousehound for bravery. "You need not threaten me. Nor you, Frederick Mole," as the secretary came around the desk. "I know *your* secrets, too. Suppose old Mr. Brayne, Mr. Gordon's uncle, should learn just who you are?"

He spoke as though the elder Brayne were still alive and these two—the present millionaire and his chief secretary were under-clerks again, while he was their mentor

"Tut, tut!" said Enderly Driggs scornfully. "Don't either of you try to frighten me. It will not go down -tut, tut! It will not go down."

He shambled toward the panel in the wall which masked the private elevator, his head shaking palsiedly and his cheeks still flushed.

Brayne, looking after him, stretched his hand toward the row of push-buttons. "Where's Quentin?" he asked thickly. "I want Quentin."

Mole for the moment paid him no attention. He, too, was watching the retreating figure of the old clerk as it hobbled into the elevator cage.

The secretary stood leaning on the desk, his right hand hovering over the row of push-buttons as the panel in the wall slid shut. He heard the faint clang of the steel door of the elevator cage before he moved or spoke.

Then he shifted his weight from one foot to the other.

"Quentin is out just at the moment, Mr. Brayne," he said in his usual low and respectful tone. "I have brought these papers for you to look at. Anything more, sir?"

"No," Gordon Brayne said, accepting the sheaf of documents.

Neither man looked at the other

Half an hour later the carriers of papers were removed from Gordon Brayne's desk and it cleared up for the day. The big man yawned, stretched his arms above his head, and rolled back his chair. Mole reappeared at the top of the flight of balcony stairs.

"Will you go out this way, Mr. Brayne?" he asked respectfully. "Holloway would like to speak with you a moment."

"Sure," agreed the president of the Brayne Operating Company. The momentary embarrassment caused both master and man by the babbling of old Driggs seemed to have passed.

He seized his hat from the rack and leaped up the stairs two at a time, with the agility of a boy. The big room was empty for the remainder of the day, save for the cleaners.

Below in the private anteroom to the Brayne offices a porter began sweeping and dusting. This room, the private elevator, and Brayne's own office on the sixth floor were always cleaned thus early, for they were sure to be empty after three o'clock.

The porter finished his job in the anteroom and slid back the panel in the wall. The upper part of the elevator car door was grilled. He fumbled with the release of the latch and finally the door started to roll back — slowly. Impatiently he forced it open.

With a hoarse cry he fell back from the gaping doorway. Out of it, slowly sliding as the door rolled back, sprawled the huddled figure of a man—a little, bald, inconsequential-looking man, more unimportant-looking in death even than in life!

"God's sake!" gasped the porter, trembling and aghast. "The man's dead!"

He remembered having seen the little man before—always going up to or returning from Gordon Brayne's office by this small elevator. He understood that he was an old employee of the master of the Brayne millions who was his benefactor now that he was superannuated.

He tried to straighten out the stiffening limbs with hands that shook. The man was dead—dead beyond recall.

Suddenly, in a panic, the porter ran out of the room and hurried to the superintendent of the building. Many of the offices were closed now. Those of the Brayne

Operating Company were completely emptied of employees. Meyer, the superintendent, could find nobody in the building who really knew anything about the poor old fellow who had died, alone and unattended, in the private elevator.

"But I am not going to bother Mr. Brayne—or Mr. Mole—about it," he said. He had already sent for an ambulance from the hospital. It and the police wagon, with a surgeon on the seat beside the driver, arrived at about the some time.

"No need of communicating with anybody but the man's family," both doctors agreed. "Get an undertaker," added the police surgeon. "Here's his name and address, poor soul. We'll phone the news to that precinct and they'll send a man to his house. No use bothering the morgue people."

The hospital physician nodded. "Heart failure," he said. "He's an old man. You say he was often about the building?"

"Yes, sir," said the trembling porter.

"Nothing mysterious about it, then," agreed the police surgeon. "Call Holborn, Mr. Meyer. Might as well give him the job. He's all right."

The two ambulances drove away. Enderly Driggs, his limbs finally straightened, lay upon a bench in that anteroom with the porter's half-soiled handkerchief over his face to keep off the flies. The little, babbling, worn-cut old clerk would go abroad no more. Nor would he threaten again the peace of either Gordon Brayne or Frederick Mole

## CHAPTER IV.

### TRAGEDY.

STOVER CONNORTON was much deeply interested in Millicent than in any young woman he had ever previously known. And it was not entirely her beauty that attracted him, although that, he confessed, was what had first drawn his attention to her.

The mystery regarding her home life—now explained had piqued him, too; and it is a dull person indeed who does not feel the appeal of mystery.

Now, however, that he had seen Enderly Driggs and understood just why his daughter shrank from having the old clerk meet strangers, Millicent had gained so strong a hold upon the student that he continued to pursue her acquaintance with as much avidity as at first.

Just what Millicent thought of him—aside from her evident pleasure in his society—he did not know. Of a frank and candid temperament, the girl still withheld any response to his not-infrequent advances toward the establishment of a closer relationship.

She must have seen that Stover Connorton was a heartily clean fellow in body and mind. He had few really serious blemishes of character

Unless it was the great fault of drifting with the current. He was not of an anxious nature. Sometimes there were not two half-dollars in his pocket to clap against each other. Money, which had of necessity been the first consideration in Millicent's cramped financial existence, was of little moment in Stover Connorton's life.

If he had it he spent it. If he lacked he went without quite as cheerfully.

At first this attitude of his toward that which, for most middle-class people, stands as the greatest thing in the world, frightened the girl. Then, when she was more used to his outlook on life, his utter carelessness in money matters gave her delicious thrills'

To be his companion was just like setting forth on some romantic venture and with little idea of what the end might be, or of the incidents along the way. And every young girl in her secret heart has a bold knight ready to do battle in the lists of the world. That is the secret, to a degree, of feminine unrest.

However, the student proved to have so many charming traits to counterbalance his disregard of money, that her natural caution let down the bars. Prudence stood aside and beheld the girl, heretofore her votary, purchase certain innocent fineries and furbelows for herself in which she had never before indulged. She wished to look her best when she went out with Connorton.

There was a consideration of moment that Millicent kept locked in her breast. It had to do with Connorton's Aunt Regina on the one hand and her own father on the other.

From the young man she had gained a fairly clear picture of the peculiar and proud old mistress of Elmscroft on whom the student, whether he would or no, was practically dependent. Aunt Regina was so proud of their name and of the family that she would never brook, it was certain, any alliance of her nephew with one whose family reputation was in the least in doubt.

For a long time Millicent had been anxious about her father's connection with Gordon Brayne. Since she had arrived at years of discretion she was thus troubled; but never so much as since the beginning of her acquaintance with Stover Connorton.

Her opportunities for meeting nice young men had been few; and none she chanced to meet had interested her more than Connorton. At least, she felt that she might, if she would, accept his addresses. He showed himself eager to be considered something more than a casual friend.

The mystery of her father's affairs stood in the way of her making any man like the student her confidant, or giving him anything more than a certain friendship. Why should Gordon Brayne pay her father that weekly stipend unless it was as a bribe? She was quite sure the Brayne Operating Company was no benevolent organization. It paid no other pensions. And her father got this money so secretly, too!

He did not walk into the cashier's office and draw it. Instead he went in by a back door, slipped into Mr. Brayne's presence in a strangely furtive manner, and spoke, when he was roused, of his hold upon the multimillionaire — as though there were some unholy alliance between them.

Once when she was quite a little girl Millicent had gone with her father into the Mirrivale Building and had waited in the first floor anteroom while he entered the private elevator and went up to the millionaire's office. The secrecy of this—its manifest peculiarity—had made a lasting impression upon the girl's mind

Now she thought: suppose some scandal should arise connecting her father with the millionaire, whose reputation in the public print was like that of many of his ilk? His published acts bore out his reputation for ruthlessness.

Millicent could not imagine Gordon Brayne giving her father this pension solely out of kindness of heart. And the old clerk's reiterated insinuations that his hold upon Brayne was of a criminal nature colored the daughter's meditations.

She could not talk about these fears with her mother. If Mrs. Driggs knew exactly why Gordon Brayne was charitable, she would not say. And her state of health made it impossible for the daughter to insist upon discussing the subject with her. Nevertheless, Millicent allowed herself the pleasure of Connorton's company, feeling all the time that she must not let their association go beyond good fellowship.

When her mother chanced to be feeling well and there was a neighbor within call (for Enderly Driggs was not of much use when his wife had her bad spells) Millicent and the student sometimes went on little excursions into the woods and fields. For the nonce he was tracing the hawk-moth—and its cousins—to its lair. He had purchased another specimen box and camera—a combination that served him well in his rambles; and his net and folding tripod looked like a fishing-rod.

Nor were his researches without some financial gain. A certain professor at Columbia desired the best of his specimens of the hawk moth with a dissertation upon his observations thereon. He told Millicent how he had once joined a party of "bug hunters" from a State agricultural college and tramped the country roads and orchards in search of that insect outlaw, the browntail moth.

"Oh, occasionally," he said laughing. "I put some of my acquired knowledge to use. Aunt Regina says I am stuffing my head so full that I shall never be able to get much of value out of it. In other words, my brain, according to her belief, will become egg-bound. It will be too fat to produce."

"You have learned so much," she sighed.

"I am almost ashamed to know so very little."

"Pshaw!" he returned with scorn of his own achievements. "I have had little else to do all my life but study. While—look at you! With your manifold duties you have made yourself proficient in stenography. See those reams upon reams of manuscript you copy on your typewriter. I think you are quite remarkable, Miss Millicent. I had no idea you were so industrious."

They came back to town this fatal Friday afternoon, and Connorton was to take supper with them for the first time. Millicent had dared invite him because this was "pay-day." Enderly Driggs never failed to come straight home from Brayne's office with the contents of his envelope intact.

But he had not arrived when Millicent ushered Connorton into the parlor and bustled out to see about getting supper.

"I can't imagine where your father is," Mrs. Driggs said, yet without any particular anxiety. "I will go in and entertain Mr. Connorton, Milly."

It was almost half past six when the girl came to the parlor door. Her face showed alarm, but only Connorton saw this. He arose quickly, excusing himself to the invalid.

"Can I do anything for you, Miss Millicent?" he asked, joining her in the long and narrow hall.

"If you wish to do an errand, I'd be obliged. She spoke cheerfully — for her mother's ear. When they were down the hall and out of ear-shot, she whispered: "I cannot remember any time these ten years when he has been late. Suppose something has happened?"

"Something probably has," he told her reassuringly. "But that may not mean something bad. Shall I go out and look for him?"

"Where will you look?"

"I'll telephone to Mr. Brayne's office. The Brayne Operating Company, in the Mirrivale Building, isn't it?"

"But the offices must be closed long ago."

"Then I'll find Brayne's private phone and ask him personally."

"But—but I fear we may offend Mr. Brayne by telephoning to him. Few know about father going to the office weekly, I am sure. It is quite true that he goes up in Mr. Brayne's private elevator and many of the employees even do not know of the existence of that shaft. Oh! What he told you about his knowing Gordon Brayne's secrets must be so."

"It will do no harm to phone, I feel sure," Connorton declared, putting on his hat. "I will recall my name to Mr. Brayne and take upon myself the responsibility of annoying him. I believe he feels under some obligation to me. At any rate, Miss Millicent, trust me to be circumspect."

What he did not tell her was that he had it in his mind to phone to the police. Something might have easily happened to the feeble Enderly Driggs. It was because of this thought that Connorton halted at the foot of the apartment-house steps as his eye lighted on a young policeman approaching with a card in his hand, and evidently looking for a house number.

"Officer!" he cried quickly. "Is it a hospital case?"

"Gee! It's a morgue case, I guess," said the policeman. "There's a guy croaked."

"Not Mr. Driggs?"

"Are you one of his family?" the officer asked cautiously.

"Then it *is* Mr. Driggs?" said the student in a husky tone. "I—I am a friend."

"Well, he's dead. Dropped dead in an elevator down to the Mirrivale Building. Heart failure, the doctors say. He's been taken to Holdorn's undertaking rooms."

The shock of the tragedy numbed Connorton for a moment. He said: "Let me break it to his family. His wife is an invalid. There is only she and her daughter. I'll go down-town afterward to the undertakers and make the proper arrangements."

"Help yourself, sir," said the young officer, with plain relief. "I ain't married to no job of telling a man's folks that he's croaked."

Connorton asked a question. It had been born in his mind of that moment of shock. "Why did not somebody in the Mirrivale Building send direct word to his family?"

"I dunno. It was after business hours

that he was found, I guess. Offices mostly close in that part of the town at three o'clock or thereabout. We were informed up here in the precinct that a porter found the body."

"In an elevator?"

"Yes. Sounds funny—what? Anything in it queer, d'ye think? Something for gumshoeing?"

Connorton took his second look at the young officer whose voice had suddenly assumed an eager tone. A rosy-cheeked, widely smiling lad, with Irish-blue eyes. Not much more than a rookie, it would seem; but wide awake.

"I guess there is nothing more mysterious in it than sudden death," the student said, on reflection. "I remember now. Mr. Driggs was in the habit of using a private elevator in that building. He could easily have fallen in it and died without anybody being the wiser. He worked for the Brayne Operating Company"

"Gordon Brayne, eh?" said the officer unctuously. "Yep? Well, if there's anything Billy Clare can do for you," said he, parting with the student at the door, "let me know."

Connorton did not consider as at all odd the interest and friendliness of the policeman. Later he remembered it. He went up-stairs slowly and to the most serious half-hour's experience of his life! It was something he never even cared to think of afterward. He had no right to comfort even Millicent save in the spirit of an ordinary friend. Yet his heart ached to take her into his arms and hush her wild sobs The mother was, for the time, almost stunned.

When they were both more quiet he assured them he would attend to everything —even to the calling of the doctor who the girl thought should see her mother before bedtime.

"Oh, Mr. Connorton! What would we do at this time without you?" Millicent said. "And what shall we do, anyway, now that poor father is gone?" was her added murmur.

It was not that Enderly Driggs's passing was so utterly unexpected. Connorton knew the girl had long been warned of it by the physicians. He guessed what was in her overwrought mind—had risen first to the surface when this trouble came.

Connorton went to the undertaking-rooms to which the old man's body had been taken and made arrangements for it to be prepared for burial and removed to the house in a simple casket next day. The ceremony was to be held there, for Mrs. Driggs might not be able to go out. The student understood there were few friends to be concerned.

He was in and out of the Driggs apartment frequently. At a time of such sorrow there are a hundred things to be done. He shouldered all this burden. Mrs. Driggs had taken to her bed after seeing her husband in the casket and Millicent had to give much attention to her. Both bereaved women leaned upon Connorton, trusting him fully.

The few people who called, and whom the young man saw, were colorless folk. Later he did not even remember their names, they made such slight impression upon his mind. Millicent and her parents had lived a particularly narrow life socially, it would seem.

The two women being so utterly alone, Connorton agreed to remain Saturday night with them. Besides, Mrs. Driggs came of that old-fashioned strain of folk whose custom it is to have somebody watch in the room with the dead. The young man encamped himself with book and shaded light in a corner of the crowded parlor where the coffin stood.

The soporific odor of flowers heaped behind the casket dulled his senses. He had raised the two window sashes as high as they would go. One of the windows gave access to the balcony of the fire escape.

To add to the dulness and oppressiveness of the evening, a warm rain was falling steadily and heavily. The gutters below were sluiceways and but few pedestrians appeared on the glistening pavement.

Connorton finally turned his lamp down to a mere glimmer. He did not find the book interesting; yet he could not bring himself to sleep.

So much had happened during the day that his brain was still active. It was al-

most impossible for him to keep still in the chair after a time. He began pacing the narrow path along one side of the little room

A huge cross of roses perfumed the damp air until it was scarcely breatheable. This floral piece bore the card of Gordon Brayne.

The arrival of this was the only sign that the millionaire had any interest in Enderly Driggs. With the contents of the dead man's pockets, which Connorton had received from the undertaker the evening before, was the sealed envelope that Millicent told him contained her father's usual stipend.

He wondered what provision Brayne would make for the family of his old pensioner? The expenses of the funeral would be a sore burden upon them, he was sure. He chanced to be in funds himself at this time, and was determined to aid Millicent all he could, and unknown to her, if that was possible.

Well, he thought, if these had been lodged in the old man's weakened mind, any secret of Gordon Brayne's, all fear of his making wrong use of it, was now past. If, as Enderly Driggs had intimated, Brayne feared him, death had removed that fear from the millionaire's path.

The face in the coffin so smooth now and waxlike—would never light up again at the mention of Gordon Brayne's name. Odd how the meek little man was so changed in manner by recalling his wandering thoughts to the head of the Brayne Operating Company. Driggs must have really hated the man whom Millicent declared had so long been their benefactor.

Midnight tolled from a neighboring steeple. The block was as dead, it seemed, as a country road at the same hour. Connorton came away from the window and sank at last with a sigh into the chair he had made comfortable with cushions

Now the night and the dulness of the occasion enveloped his senses. Did he sleep?

He must have sunk into a doze. He opened his eyes, but without being startled, to see a figure leaning over the open casket —a figure, in wet and glistening garments, that must have just stepped in through the open window from the fire escape.

## CHAPTER V.

### STEP CAREFULLY!

OF course Connorton did *not* see anybody stooping over the open coffin in which lay Enderly Driggs, and fumbling at the breast of the corpse. This the young man assured himself between waking and sleeping as he sat in the deeply shadowed corner of the parlor. It was an hallucination. It must be!

No burglar, all glistening with the rime of the wet streets, had slipped in from the balcony to rob the corpse. There was nothing there to steal. All that had been mortal of Enderly Driggs was dressed in the neat, black, pocketless suit furnished by the undertaker, and wore no ornament whatsoever save the black buttons linking his cuffs.

Nodding, still half dozing, Stover Connorton thought the tall and shadowy figure moved quickly from the casket and approached the window. Had some sound—some movement on his part—startled this intruder? It glided through the aperture and passed out of sight along the fire-escape toward the ladder.

Suddenly Connorton came to his feet. The room was empty save for his own presence; yet he was impressed by the feeling that somebody had been here with him but the moment before. The marauder had been real—and he had entered and departed by the window.

The student turned higher the gas-lamp and switched the shade around until the beam of light fell upon the spot where the figure had seemed to stand. The rug was rumpled there. Connorton knelt down to feel of it. The rug was wet!

Hatless as he was and without his coat, he leaped to the window and out upon the balcony. The street, as he peered down, seemed just as dark and deserted as before.

The window of the other apartment opening upon his balcony was dark and tightly closed. The ladders leading upward to the roof were empty. He was sure the intruder had not gone that way.

He scrambled down the two ladders to the ground-floor balcony. A short ladder hung into the area; but he could easily vault the railing and swing himself over the fence to the sidewalk.

When he landed there in the shadow, a sinewy hand seized his right arm with a paralyzing grasp above the elbow, while the point of a night-stick was pressed tightly against his jugular. He knew that on the instant he made a contrary move the force behind that stick would fling him half-way across the street!

"How many more of youse is up there?" demanded the policeman hoarsely. "I seen the first guy running; but I got you—"

"Be the piper that played before Pharoah! You're that lad, Mr. Connorton. Did ye come down from the Driggs flat?"

"Yes."

"What's goin' on up there?" demanded the officer, who proved to be the same who had brought the news of Enderly Driggs's death. "Tis not a wake, is it?"

"I was sitting up alone. Fell asleep. Saw that fellow—not very clearly, officer in the room when I woke up. He slipped out and down this way."

"Second-story guy—and I missed him," grunted the disgusted young officer. "It's Billy Clare has the bad luck. I'll never get me step-up if I let such chances get by me."

"I don't think he could have stolen anything," Connorton said reflectively. "He was standing beside the old man's coffin when I saw him. He got no farther than the parlor."

"Ye scared him off," said Billy Clare. "Some of these Harlem guns has got the gall of Dugan's goat! I'll have to report he got away," and he sighed. "I was standing by the corner beyant when I saw himself swing over the rail just as you did. He ran the other way. A tall, thin lad—like an evil shadow."

"Well," Connorton said, "I'll have to get back the same way. I have no key."

"I'll stop here and see you do the *Romeo* act safely," said the young officer, grinning. "But don't do it again. Some of these flatties that get excited easy might have pulled a gat on you in my place."

"Much obliged to you, officer."

"Don't say a word," said Billy Clare confidentially. "If ye ever want to do me a favor, have something happen around here with a mystery in it. Something I can set the teeth of me wits into.

"I don't want to pound the pavement till I get flatfoot," confessed the young officer in a hoarse whisper. "I want to get into the detective branch, I do.

"Look here! Suppose this old guy—Driggs is his name—was croaked and t'rown into that elevator down town there by the gang that done it? *That* would be something for a fellow to chisel on."

"Great Scott!" Connorton ejaculated. "What would Mr. Driggs be murdered for?"

"His money, maybe."

"And he living here?" the student said, with a gesture indicating the house and the neighborhood.

"That's so, Mr. Connorton. But he might have known something—a secret that the gang didn't want told," Billy Clare said eagerly. "I was just supposin'. And this guy that climbed up there to-night might be one of the gang."

"Good night!" exclaimed Connorton, climbing over the fence and getting upon the ladder.

Billy Clare chuckled, standing there on the sidewalk and watching the student ascend. "'Tis a great imagination I have, Mr. Connorton," he whispered shrilly. "That's what me Uncle Dan says—Dan Costigan, the inspector. He says I'll either make a fly-cop or a movie-play writer before I'm finished."

Connorton kept on climbing without making further reply. To tell the truth, he was not amused—not a little bit.

Enderly Driggs—secrets—murdered—a mysterious visitor at midnight. The student shook himself when he had entered the half-darkened parlor again. He was wet on arms and shoulders to his skin. There were some sandwiches covered by a napkin and a decanter of sherry on a little table. He poured himself a warming drink.

He could not shake off the feeling that the mystery touched him nearly. He wondered what the hungry-minded Billy Clare

would suspect if he were possessed of the information that ruffled his, Connorton's, thought?

He lit one of the gas-jets of the chandelier directly above the casket. The yellow light made the yellow face of the man in the coffin seem more like that of a waxen figure than before.

The hands that had been crossed upon the breast were disarranged. As Connorton bent above the corpse and would have decently replaced the stiffened hands, he noted that they were not waxlike in appearance as was the dead man's face. The fingers of the right hand seemed somewhat swollen, and, if they were not exactly red, they were not of the usual hue of dead flesh.

Connorton, curious, examined the other hand. He turned it with difficulty until he could see the palm.

There was no discoloration of the fingers of the left hand; but in the middle of the palm was an irregular mark, larger than a half-dollar, that must have been inflamed when the hand was that of a living man.

The student gazed upon this mark for some moments. The longer he looked at it the more clearly the mark seemed defined.

What had made this singular stain upon the flesh of Enderly Driggs's left palm? Was it an old scar, or a new? Was it the result of something that had happened to the hand since the man had died, or before? Could it be the stain of some acid the undertaker had used?

In Connorton's mind the phrases still ran: "Enderly Driggs—secrets—murdered—a mysterious visitor at midnight." All the component parts of an elemental tragedy were here.

Why had the hands of the dead man in the coffin been disarranged by the mysterious intruder? True, Connorton might have doubted the actual presence of that visitor had it not been for the testimony of the young policeman. But he was sure now, in any case, that the position of the dead man's hands had been altered.

For what purpose? Was somebody besides himself curious about the mark upon Enderly Driggs's left palm?

It seemed so ridiculous that a man of Mr. Driggs's kind should have any mystery at all connected with him, living or dead. Yet the superannuated clerk of the Brayne Operating Company, ten years pensioned by the millionaire head of that concern, had claimed to possess vital knowledge of secrets which Gordon Brayne was willing to pay to keep hidden from the world

What had happened ten years and more before in Brayne's office that was hushed up, smothered, kept from the newspapers and the police perhaps, and which Millicent's father had locked in *his* breast, too?

These recurrent thoughts plunged Connorton's mind into the deeps of a muddy retrospection, out of which a single clear idea refused to emerge. Yet he came around finally to the mark on the dead man's palm and the curiosity of the mid night intruder.

It *was* a strange mark. The student could not discover a sane explanation for it. He doubted strongly if it had been caused by any act of the undertaker or his assistants.

He would inquire of the undertaker, of course. Meanwhile—

Connorton slowly turned out the gas-flame that shone directly upon the casket The shaded reading-lamp afforded light enough for the purpose that had formed in his mind.

He drew the shades down close over the two windows. He reached from the top of the player-piano his specimen box and camera which he had forgotten since returning with Millicent from the country on Friday afternoon. His folding net-staff and tripod stood in the corner. He set up the tripod and fastened the camera-box upon it, preparing the machine for use. He chanced to have some flash-powder in his case.

The arrangement of the dead man's hand with a proper background for photography was the most difficult part of the affair. The cover-cloth of the little table on which Millicent had set out his lunch had a dead-black lining. In removing the cloth from the table he spilled some of the sherry.

"Come, come!" Connorton told himself.

"Unsteady hands mean nervousness. That will never do."

He drank the remainder of the wine in the glass, and felt better. This *was* a gruesome task.

With some effort he arranged the dead man's hand against the black plush cloth. He made sure that the parlor door was tightly closed. Millicent and her mother were abed somewhere at the rear of the apartment.

When everything was rigged to suit him Connorton turned out the lamp, exposed the camera plate, and set off the powder. The flash illuminated the room vividly. The palm with the strange mark upon it stood out with ghastly plainness in the few seconds of the exposure. Connorton hoped the picture would be as clear when it was printed.

He lit the gas-jet again, and as he did so he heard a small clatter upon the iron balcony. He turned swiftly and listened. Had the intruder returned?

Without thinking that the act would warn whoever might be out there, he turned out the gas again before tiptoeing to the window. Shooting up the shade, he peered out.

The rain blew in his face. The balcony was empty. He craned his neck to see below. There was nobody on the ladders.

"Nerves again," he muttered, withdrawing fully into the parlor.

Removing all traces of his work, he arranged the dead man's hands once more, so that nobody might suspect that they had been disturbed. He shrank from having Millicent, for instance, know that he had been so ghoulishly employed.

There was no more sleep for him that night. He could not have closed his eyes again had he desired. His nerves were on the jump, and, as a usual thing, Stover Connorton was not made aware that he even possessed nerves!

The mystery regarding Enderly Driggs's death was etched more clearly now upon his mind. The doctors might be perfectly right in assigning the cause of the old man's death to heart-failure. Of course they were! But what had caused the mark upon his palm?

Was it the overworked imagination of the young police officer, Billy Clare, that had thus set Connorton's own suspicions to milling in his mind? Or was there a deeper reason for his thoughts having clamped themselves to the several puzzling circumstances surrounding Enderly Driggs's death?

Connorton went to his lodgings as soon as Millicent made him a bit of breakfast, presumably to get a few hours' sleep before the funeral. But he carried his black box with him, and first of all he developed the picture he had made of the dead man's hand.

## CHAPTER VI.

### NONE OF HIS BUSINESS.

THE picture developed just as Stover Connorton desired. Nothing could be more clear than the impression of the dead man's hand with the irregular stain upon it about the size though not the shape of a half-dollar.

In the full light of day—and a day that had broken at dawn most gloriously from the shackles of both night and the storm—he was more doubtful of the premises he had assumed regarding this queer mark upon the left palm of Enderly Driggs.

Had he not been so positive of the visit of the unknown to the parlor of the Driggs' apartment and his ghoulish interest in this same mark, Connorton might have felt less certainty that the scar held any significance.

The testimony of his own eyes and that of the young policeman, Billy Clare, forced him to hold the belief that there had been an intruder. There was "something queer about it"—undoubtedly! How young Billy Clare would love to set "the teeth of his wits" into the mystery!

It was something, however, Connorton felt he could tell to nobody. He must investigate it alone. It was so vague—so wild—so seemingly improbable—that he dared not speak to any one of his suspicions and of the discovery of the night.

Least of all could he talk to Millicent about it. Within these two days of trouble

and sorrow he had been privileged to draw very close to the heart of the beautiful girl, in a brotherly way. She had not for a moment let down the barrier against the warmer attitude Stover Connorton would have been glad to assume. She admitted him to her friendship; but he could not get closer than that.

He was proud that the girl and her mother awarded him the confidence and trust they did. He had never assumed responsibility for others before, not even in so small a degree. It was not an ungrateful experience.

Connorton was growing more serious. He was awakened to the fact that, after all, his life had been thus far inconsequential and aimless. He was a dallier in the world; he had no real goal in view.

The thought had insinuated itself into his mind that he should go to Aunt Regina and urge her to give him a proper start in business life—a foundation on which he might safely build for himself.

Heretofore he had seldom thought of his dependence on his ancient relative. Aunt Regina loved to "manage" for him, he knew. He began to feel, however, that it was beneath his dignity as a man to remain so utterly dependent upon anybody —especially upon a woman.

A nice girl a plucky and independent girl like Millicent would surely refuse to link her fortunes with that of a fellow who merely dawdled about, waiting for the apple to drop into his lap!

Such meditations as these had become more insistent in the student's mind of late But on this morning of poor Enderly Driggs's funeral his brain was filled with other and more pregnant thoughts.

He returned to the apartment some time before the hour set for the simple ceremony. The undertaker did not arrive until the rooms were quite filled with the friends and neighbors who had been invited to attend. Connorton found no opportunity then of speaking with him in private. The lid of the casket was locked fast. No further examination could easily be made of the scarred hand of the corpse.

The student rode to the cemetery with Millicent and Mrs. Driggs, the latter possessing the determination, if not an abundance of strength, for the journey.

It was a lovely day, the whole world washed clean by the night's rain—a day for joy rather than sorrow. That Millicent and her mother felt keenly the sudden severing of those ties which had bound them to Enderly Driggs could not be doubted; yet, Connorton thought, there must be an infinite measure of relief in their hearts, as well

Particularly in the case of Millicent. He had seen clearly that her father was a sore trial to the girl. His idiosyncrasies did not trouble her as much as that fear regarding Gordon Brayne, of which she had spoken to Connorton.

She need not worry now that the millionaire would be offended by anything his old clerk might say in public.

Mr. Brayne had sent nothing but the floral piece—no word at all to relieve the anxiety of Enderly Driggs's widow and daughter. Of this Connorton did not so much think. It was not his nature to be anxious for the morrow.

He accepted as conclusive the idea that Mr. Driggs's employer would continue his pension for the bereaved family. What Millicent expected her sad and anxious countenance did not wholly betray.

The last words were said above the grave of the man who had lived, it seemed, so futile a life for the past ten years. They rode home, and Connorton tried to talk cheerfully on the way. The widow responded to his ministrations more quickly than Millicent. The girl's heart and mind were burdened by an anxiety that she did not verbally express

"We are going to be very lonely, especially at first," Mrs. Driggs said. "*Do* come and see us frequently, Mr. Connorton. You have been so kind."

"Don't fear," he told her. "I shall be wearing out my welcome. Miss Millicent knows how to reach me by telephone, if she needs me in a hurry. There are several things yet I may do for you."

One of these he said nothing about to Millicent, but went ahead and did it. This was to make arrangements with the undertaker so that he would present no bill to

the harassed girl. It depleted Connorton's quarterly funds seriously to do this; but he determined to get on somehow.

The opportunity was ripe, too, when he saw the undertaker on this business to inquire regarding the strange mark on Enderly Driggs's palm.

"Oh, no, Mr. Connorton," he was assured. "That could not have been caused by anything we did to the body in any event. But often an old scar or stain upon the flesh will become more distinct after a certain time has elapsed following dissolution.

"But in this case I noted the mark myself—yes, sir. The fingers of the other hand were swollen, you say? Possibly I wonder what Mr. Driggs could have been doing immediately prior to his death? That might explain the seeming mystery. However, I consider the mark of no moment. I would not worry about it if I were you—or allow the ladies to worry."

"They did not notice it," Connorton said briefly.

"So much the better then. Women in the nervous state which almost always attends such a sad happening as this death are easily disturbed and fluttered. Mr. Driggs had a bad heart. The medical opinion as to his death is of course incontrovertible.

"Exertion, excitement, a dozen causes, might have occasioned his death from heart-failure; or, seemingly, nothing at all. You are quite positive the family does not know about the scar?"

Connorton told him no. And he had no intention of asking Millicent or Mrs. Driggs about it further to assure himself. But he asked another question of the stern undertaker:

"Who was the doctor who pronounced him dead and issued the certificate?"

"Both a police surgeon and an ambulance doctor from St. Jude's saw the body. Their pronouncements regarding the cause of death were the same."

But Connorton was not at all satisfied Enderly Driggs might have died of heart-failure, but that did not explain the mark upon the palm. The undertaker took interest enough to suggest further:

"Could not this mark you are so anxious to know about have been caused by his fall?"

"It didn't look like a bruise," grumbled the student.

He did not show the photograph of the dead man's hand to the undertaker. But he had studied it himself so that he was sure of every peculiarity of the scar– its shape and coloring.

Its hue was different from the remainder of the palm, it was true; but he was quite positive that bruised blood had not caused its odd appearance. Together with the swollen fingers of the right hand Connorton considered that the odd scars looked more like scalds or burns.

"And *that's* foolish," he told himself. "Under what circumstances did he die that his hands were so disfigured? Or what did he do just prior to death that should have caused those marks?"

Stover Connorton had seen Driggs frequently enough in life to be positive that there was no stain upon his palm that could have become so eminently prominent after death.

But he had talked about it enough to the undertaker. He did not wish to take the man into his confidence, or rowel his mind with his own suspicions. Indeed, those suspicions were too slightly defined to be called such. They were at the best surmises.

And, it must likewise be confessed, they were at present perfectly aimless surmises. He did not know what it was he suspected! Was there in his mind a fear that foul play had brought about Enderly Driggs's death? He was not ready to admit of an affirmative answer to this query.

The mark alone upon the dead man's hand might have started only mild curiosity to simmering in Connorton's mind. It was the midnight visitor and his interest in that same mark that spurred the student so keenly.

On the other hand, the apparition in the room where the dead man lay might have easily been laid to the attempt of a sneak-thief to rob the apartment—as Billy Clare, the policeman, suggested—were Connorton not so sure the visitor had entered for the

sole purpose of scrutinizing the scarred palm of the man in the coffin.

He was upon a veritable mental carousal. His mind went around and around again—and to the same tune: "Enderly Driggs—secrets—murdered—a mysterious visitor at midnight!"

It was really none of his business. And yet he was just as determined to unravel the mystery connected with Mr. Driggs's death as though it were vitally important to his own happiness.

The thing he felt to be of first importance was a knowledge of just how the body of Gordon Brayne's old clerk was found, and by whom. He desired, too, to interview the two doctors who had seen the body; but he did not know how to go about that without arousing suspicion—especially in the case of the police surgeon.

Being of a direct rather than a circuitous mind, Connorton hied him to the Mirrivale Building from the undertaking rooms and asked to see the superintendent.

"I wish to know, Mr. Meyer," he began, "who the porter was who found the body of Mr. Driggs Friday afternoon last in that private elevator which leads to the offices of the Brayne Operating Company. There are certain details I would like to have explained."

"You are a reporter?" questioned the superintendent, a bespectacled and gray-mustached man of soldierly bearing—a man who could undoubtedly obey orders like a Cossack. "We would rather the papers let the matter drop. The man died of natural causes, and the mere fact that he was not found for a couple of hours or so is of no importance, although it might excite public controversy. That elevator is Mr. Brayne's private property, and is only used by a few. That explains why the man's body was not at once discovered."

"I am not from a paper," Connorton explained.

"Oh!" The superintendent looked as though he feared he had been led into saying too much. "What is your business, pray?"

"I was a friend of Mr. Driggs. Am a friend of his wife and daughter. Naturally his death shocked them very much. The matter could not pass without *some* inquiry, Mr. Meyer."

"Why not?" demanded the other.

"Pardon me," the student said, frankly betraying his surprise. "You can easily imagine that his friends and family are interested in all the details."

The superintendent grunted.

"I wish to speak with the porter in question," continued Connorton.

"Oh, you can talk to him if you like. But he knows nothing more than I can tell you," said Meyer with annoyance. "I don't care to have my men taken from their work."

"Who is he? I will talk to him in his noon hour."

"Oh, see him now if you wish," snorted Meyer. "He's somewhere about the building, I suppose. Ask the hallman for John Hammond."

Having made sure Connorton was from no newspaper, the superintendent evidently considered him merely a busybody who could, after all, do no harm. It was probable that Meyer had been warned to fend off all newspaper inquiry into the Driggs tragedy, and considered that he had done his duty and did not wish to be concerned further in the matter.

From the car-starter or hallman Connorton was sent, under the guidance of a boy, to the rear of the building. John Hammond was pottering about some job in the basement. He was a garrulous and simple old fellow. If anybody had considered it important to warn the superintendent of the building against nosing reporters, John Hammond was not of sufficient importance to be stoppered. He was quite willing to gossip about the finding of Enderly Driggs's body.

"Only one other porter and me ever sweeps out that room and dusts the elevator car," said John Hammond, accepting the cigar Connorton offered him. "Not many in the building ever heard of it at all, I guess. Mr. Brayne mostly uses it to get in and out of his office to escape them that lay in wait."

"That lay in wait?" repeated the student curiously.

"The importunate," John Hammond

said. "A man with Mr. Brayne's money is a mark for those who *want* money. D'ye see?"

"I see you are a philosopher."

"A bit of a one, mayhap. Well, this old fellow who died so sadly was one of the few that knowed about that private elevator shaft. Mr. Mole, who was proper shocked by it, said the man was a clerk for Mr. Brayne a number of years ago."

"So he was. This Mr. Mole is an employee of the millionaire?" asked Connorton quickly.

"Oh, Mr. Mole is Mr. Brayne's secretary quite his right-hand man, 'tis well known."

"He was on the spot when you found the body of Mr. Driggs?"

"Oh, no, sir. They had both left the building- both he and Mr. Brayne."

"Not by this private elevator, of course."

"You say right, sir. For once they both went out front; though Mr. Brayne's car was waiting around here in the side street, as it almost always does. His lady was in it."

"Mrs. Brayne?" asked Connorton. "In a high-powered green car?"

"True for you, sir. I guess you know the turnout. And it was there Friday. But I heard Mr. Mole say he and Mr. Brayne went out of the building by the front together half an hour after he saw this Driggs step into the little elevator. The poor old man got into the car at the sixth floor, started it, and then fell dead of his heart. The car stopped when it reached the bottom of the shaft, of course. I tell you, it give me a start when I opened the car door and the old fellow rolled half out of it and sprawled at my feet. It was an awful sight."

"He must have fallen against the car door," commented Connorton reflectively.

"He did so. The poor body! And dying in that car alone. I tell you what's me belief, sir," added John Hammond, lowering his voice to a confidential tone, "that elevator shaft is bad luck—devilish bad luck!"

"Bad luck for poor old Driggs, sure enough," the student agreed, yet with his mind not wholly upon the porter's last words.

"And for others," whispered the porter, earnestly wagging his head.

Connorton did not lack quick perception. Gordon Brayne himself had commented upon that fact. The significance of the porter's speech suddenly took hold of the young man's attention.

"How's that?" he asked, eying John Hammond with renewed interest. "Anybody else ever hurt in that elevator shaft?"

"Killed, sir."

"Another man killed there?" gasped Connorton.

"A woman, sir. I heard of it when I first come here seven year or more ago. But it happened before my time. Quite ten years ago, I believe."

The listener restrained both his impatience and his astonishment. But it was difficult. Ten years ago! Another tragedy in Brayne's private elevator!

"Tell me what you heard about that former case," he said to John Hammond, anxiety in his voice.

"Not much did I hear, sir. It was something that was smothered—covered up. It was a girl that worked for Mr. Brayne, I understand. She was found dead in that very same car; but 'twas not generally known. I was told the papers got it that she dropped dead of heart trouble, or apoplexy, or the like, in one of the main elevators.

"But the man that told me said 'twas in that little car that goes up to Mr. Brayne's office. Quite a curious coincidence, sir."

"Curious—if true," Connorton muttered, deeply reflective. "And this happened ten years ago?"

"Or more," John Hammond assured him.

Ten years before something had happened in Gordon Brayne's office, or connected with his office, which had so affected Enderly Driggs that he had never been exactly right in his mind from that time till his sudden and tragic death.

It was a startling thought.

**(To Be Continued NEXT WEEK.)**

# AN ITEM OF UNFINISHED BUSINESS.

BY JOHNSTON McCULLEY.

**A Railway Purchasing Agent Narrowly Escapes Being "Derailed" When He Bumps Into an Opportunity of Making Easy Money.**

BRANSON, the purchasing agent, whirled around in his desk-chair and looked up with a smile as Wheelock was ushered into the office by old Conley.

There was such a substantial look about Wheelock, the head of the great lumber company from which Branson purchased thousands upon thousands of ties for the railroad

Rumor said that Wheelock had started in life as a poor boy and had fought his way to the top. He was almost a millionaire now, but he didn't neglect the business When there was a hard knot to unravel, the board of directors of the lumber company sat back while Wheelock rolled up his sleeves and unraveled it.

"I've come on a pleasant errand, Branson," Wheelock said, as he sat down at the end of the desk and bent forward confidentially. "There are some misguided persons who say that a visit from me generally means trouble, but I guess I've never caused *you* much trouble, eh?"

"Instead, you have helped me out several times," Branson admitted, smiling.

"Just so! Branson, you've been here buying ties and other stuff for five years, haven't you? In that time business relations between my firm and you have been pleasant. We have a lot of trouble with purchasing agents of all sorts, in all parts of the country, but we've never had any trouble with *you*. You always know just what you want, you tell us, and we get it for you if we possibly can. Isn't that correct?"

"That's right, Mr. Wheelock."

"And maybe you think that we don't appreciate it! We held a directors' meeting the other day, and we were talking of this very thing. 'If all purchasing agents were like Branson, life would be a rosy dream,' one of our directors said. And so we have decided to show our esteem. We voted to make you a little present; we want to show our appreciation of a man who knows his business."

"I'd know that you appreciated our relations—even without a present," Branson said

"But the present has been decided upon and voted by the board," Wheelock went on. "We scratched our heads about three hours, trying to decide just what sort of a present to give you. None of us believed in gold watches, or diamond rings, or medals, or loving cups—they're only a lot of junk! So we decided to let you purchase your own present, and then you'd appreciate it more and be better satisfied. So I was instructed to hand you an order on our cashier, and you can get the cash on the order, and buy what present you desire."

"But, Mr. Wheelock "

"Don't come any of that modesty stuff now! You are entitled to it, and it pleases us to give it to you. It isn't graft, Branson, or anything like it. It is only a mark of esteem, from a big corporation, to a business associate, the representative of another big corporation. I guess your railroad can't kick at that! It isn't necessary, anyway, for the road to know

"You'll get cash for the order, and the order'll be torn up before your eyes, if you wish it. Here you are, Branson, and in the name of the board of directors I thank you for our cordial relations in the past, and hope that they'll continue."

He extended the order, and Branson took

it in his hand and glanced at it. It was for one thousand dollars

"It is entirely too much, Mr. Wheelock!" he protested.

"Never mind that, Branson! Your old railroad doesn't pay you enough to make you rich beyond the dreams of avarice, I take it. In fact, Branson, I'm afraid that your road doesn't appreciate you as much as it should—it has so many thousands of employees. But we, who do business with you, appreciate you and your ability.

"And now I'll just give you a little confidential tip. We are going to have a certain position open at the end of the present year—one of our men is going to retire. That position, Branson, pays twelve thousand dollars a year and demands a lot of work but you could fill it. Just keep this quiet, and if you should want to leave the road at the end of the year—I guess that is enough for the present."

"Why, thank you, Mr. Wheelock! I'm not exactly getting rich, as you intimated, and I've thought at times of leaving the road if I could find something better. I'll think about it, sir."

"You'd better think a great deal about it, Branson. You're old enough to be married and settled down with a good income."

"I'm thirty, Mr. Wheelock."

"And not married?"

"I've—er—been waiting—"

"Until you are in better circumstances, eh? That's a mistake, Branson. You've—er—decided on the young lady?"

"Yes; but we've been waiting—"

"Well, you shouldn't wait much longer. You take that order and get yourself a present, or use it as a nest-egg if you like. We want you to do with it what 'll please you the most. That is why we didn't get you a watch or a loving cup. It is a pleasure to do business with a man like you."

"Thank you, Mr. Wheelock."

"It isn't always a pleasure to do business with people, as you well know. Take old Monks, for instance. You know him, of course, Branson—you buy ties from him once in a while, don't you?"

"Occasionally."

"Old Monks has a homestead up the river thirty miles, and he and his six strapping sons live there. He's got good timber, too, and we've tried for years to buy him out. He'll not sell to us at any price—has an old grudge against our company. He makes his living by running ties down the river and selling them to you—that's the only income he has. We've tried in every way to get hold of that land of his, and we've failed. We offered him a good price, too."

"He'll not sell just because he hates your company?"

"That's his only reason—he admits that the price we offer is all right. He'd have to sell to us if he couldn't peddle his ties, Branson—and he can't peddle ties at a profit unless he sells them to you."

Wheelock looked away and through the window, and puffed at his cigar. Branson was disturbed a bit by the intimation in Wheelock's words

The door to the adjoining office opened, and Conley, Branson's old clerk, shuffled in and put some papers on his chief's desk, and shuffled out again.

"Well, I must be going," Wheelock said, after Conley had gone. "Remember, Branson, that the big job will be open at the end of the year, and it 'll be yours for the asking. Twelve thousand a year! I guess you could marry on that, eh? So-long!"

Wheelock had slipped through the door and was gone before Branson could reply. Branson got up from the chair and walked to the window, to look down the busy street toward the river. Wheelock's words had been plain, and his meaning plainer. The big job was Branson's if he refused to purchase ties from old Monks. That was the first demand the lumber company made upon him!

The railroad didn't pay him enough, and didn't offer much in the way of promotion, Branson thought. He couldn't ask the woman he loved to marry him on his present salary. But if that salary was twelve thousand a year

And it didn't make a particle of difference to the road from whom Branson purchased ties, so long as they were up to standard, and the price was at the market. Old Monks and his six sons didn't supply many at that. He easily could refuse to

purchase from them. He wouldn't be injuring the road a bit—he'd not be paying more to some one else for inferior stock.

And there was the big job to be considered. Once with the great lumber company, there might be a chance for promotion, for investment a chance to become wealthy and independent.

Branson put the thousand-dollar order in his waistcoat-pocket. A thousand was almost nothing to the great lumber company, but it was considerable to the purchasing agent of the railroad. He couldn't remember of ever hearing of the road making a thousand-dollar present.

Again old Conley opened the door, and this time he ushered into Branson's office a stoop-shouldered old man with a long, ragged gray beard, a man who removed his faded and battered hat in courtesy to Branson and seemed to flinch when his rough boots beat against the office floor

Old Monks was a character in his way, and heretofore Branson always had been glad to see him come into the office. It gladdened him to see the old man's eyes light up when he was handed a check for his ties. But Branson was not glad to see him now.

"Good mornin', Mr. Branson," Monks said, standing at the end of the desk and twirling his hat in his fingers. "Me and my boys just got down the river with some ties I reckon we've got almost four thousand this time, Mr. Branson. And they're good ties! You won't find many culls in 'em, sir.

"I've got 'em down below the old River bank Hotel, and the boys are gettin' them on land already. I told your inspector, Mr. Branson, that I'd bet he wouldn't find many culls in this here lot. No, sir! He won't put his chalk marks on many of these!"

"I—I'm sorry, Monks," Branson said in a low tone, "but I'm afraid that I can't buy your ties."

"Not buy my ties!" Monks cried, sudden alarm in his voice. "Are you a foolin' me, Mr. Branson, sir? They're the best in three years, sir! The boys and me worked like blazes gettin' 'em out. We've got to float 'em a long ways, you know, 'cause the big lumber company won't let us haul across their land. And I reckon there ain't more'n four thousand of 'em all told. Surely you're jokin' me, Mr. Branson. Ain't you jokin'?"

"I am not joking, Monks. The road has a lot of ties on hand just now, and we're slowing up a bit in the purchasing line, you see. I'm afraid that I can't buy this lot, Monks."

"But what'll I do with 'em, sir? It's two hundred miles to any other road, and I can't afford to ship 'em. No, I couldn't afford to ship 'em away from the river. And I can't take 'em back, of course—ties won't float up-stream, Mr. Branson, sir. What c'n I do about it, if you don't buy 'em?"

"I'm sorry, Monks."

"Me and the boys worked like blazes gettin' out them ties. It's the only way we've got to get money, sir, and we've got to have some money, of course. There's taxes comin' due, and my six big boys eat a lot. Couldn't you take them ties, sir, say at a discount from the regular price?"

"If I took them from you at all, Monks, you'd get the regular price," Branson replied. "But I just can't purchase them that's all."

Monks stepped away from the desk and walked slowly toward the door. His shoulders seemed stooped more than usual, as if they bore an added weight, and his face was grayer. He turned at the door and looked once at Branson, and then went on out.

Branson walked to the window again. It had been a disagreeable thing to do, but it was over now. He tried hard to justify himself by saying that a man had the right to think of himself and his own interests first, to advance himself if he could, to lay the foundation for a home and a fortune.

He looked again at Wheelock's order for a thousand dollars, and it cheered him somewhat. He put it back in his pocket, and began to whistle, trying hard to forget the look that had been on old Monks's face as he went through the door.

Old Conley shuffled in once more and arranged more papers on his chief's desk.

Conley was something of a mystery to Branson. At his books, he was far superior to the usual run of clerks, and he seemed

to have the soul of a purchasing agent himself. He had been with Branson five years, and he had been in the office for five years before that. But always Conley lived by himself, seldom spoke except on business matters, and seemed to be very retiring. He was patient and loyal—and melancholy. Branson could not remember ever seeing Conley smile.

"Your letters, sir," Conley said now.

Branson whirled toward him.

"For Heaven's sake, Conley, cheer up!" he exclaimed. "What's the matter with you, anyway? You go around all the time like there was a funeral in the office or a sick man next door."

"I try to do my work, sir."

"Try? You do it perfectly, confound it! I'm not kicking about your work. You are faithful, and you're loyal to me and the road, and I have a sneaking notion that you like me."

"I do, sir!" Old Conley raised his eyes and met those of Branson squarely. "I liked you from the first moment I saw you, sir. I told myself that you had the makings of a great railroad man in you—that you had brains and knew how to use them, and would always be fair and square and honest."

"Well, that's a pretty good recommendation, Conley, and I thank you. But why do you seem so soured on life, Conley? Haven't you any ambition?"

"At my age, sir? I'm fifty-five. But I had ambition, sir—once, years ago."

"Bad luck, eh? Got some hard knocks, and they knocked all the ambition out of you?"

"It was all my own fault, sir. When I was thirty, sir, I had a better position than you have now—if you'll pardon me, sir. I was a purchasing agent then."

"Ah! I can understand now why you get to the bottom of things so easily."

"Yes, sir. I was drawing two thousand a year, sir. That isn't as much as you're getting now, of course, sir. What I meant when I said I had a better job was that there was more responsibility to it. I was in direct line for promotion, too—but it didn't come fast enough to suit me."

"I see."

"I began to snarl at the road, sir. That's the start of any railroad man's downfall, when he begins to snarl at the road that hires him.

"I began to think that I wasn't being treated just right, sir. I handled hundreds of thousands of dollars, and I knew that I was a good man in the position, but the road didn't seem to appreciate me."

"And you resigned?"

"I did more than that, sir. I made a deal with a big corporation to purchase exclusively from them a certain commodity, and to shut out the little fellows. Oh, I didn't swindle the road, sir! I didn't pay them any more than their goods were worth—but I did cut out the little dealers. You see, sir, the corporation offered me a big-paying job and a better chance for advancement. So, at the end of a year or so, I resigned and went to take the bigger job."

Branson looked up at Conley a bit suspiciously as he answered.

"And you didn't stick to the bigger job, Conley?"

"Just one year, sir, and then they—they kicked me out! You see, I wasn't in a position to do any more dirty work for them. The railroad never knew I'd been crooked, sir—not the railroad. But the big corporation knew, and I suppose they figured that I'd sold out the railroad, and so might sell *them* out if anybody made an offer big enough."

"I see," Branson said.

"So I tried to get another good job, sir, and somehow I couldn't. I always was asked why I had left the big corporation, and it seemed that I never could explain exactly. There soon came a time when I had lost all ambition and was willing to work at anything at all. I had a new job every few months, sir, and just salary enough to get along. Then I came here—and here I am glad to stay. All I'm asking now is enough to pay for rent, and food, and clothing. My ambition is dead—I'm not after anything better. I'd ought to be a big man now, sir, holding some responsible position and getting a big salary, but I'm not. I've been scrapped, Mr. Branson. I'm railroad junk—just a bit of junk!"

"Conley, were you listening when Mr.

Wheelock was talking to me a short time ago?"

"I couldn't help overhearing, sir. It is an old game, and it surprised me to think that they'd try it on you. I'm sure that you'll not do as they wish, sir. To do that, you'd have to be unfair with the road, and that's where a railroad man begins to go down hill when he gets unfair to the road.

"The slowest way is the *surest* way to promotion and wealth, Mr. Branson—if you'll pardon me the remark. The best money is the money you *work hardest* to get. There is no such thing as '*easy money*,' sir. I know—I wrecked my life to find that out! And that's why I don't cheer up and smile, sir."

Old Conley picked up some letters and shuffled toward the door. His head was bent forward and his shoulders were stooped, and he presented the picture of a man for whom life holds nothing but dead dreams and a sordid day-to-day existence, with no hope save for a releasing death.

Branson called to him, stopped him, went forward and put an arm around his shoulders.

"I'm glad that you've told me, Conley," he said. "And I am glad that you like me. I'll try hard to merit your regard. That is all just now, Conley. Bring me that statement of supplies this afternoon, if it is possible."

He shut the door after the old clerk had passed out. He walked to the window again, then whirled toward his desk and sat down before it. From his waistcoat-pocket he took Wheelock's order for a thousand dollars cash. He looked at it—and hesitated.

Then, with a peculiar smile playing about the corners of his lips, Branson tore the order across, folded it and tore it again, and let the bits of paper drop gently into the waste-basket

His hand went out and pulled the telephone toward him.

"Hello!" he said. "Give me the Riverbank Hotel! This the Riverbank? I want to speak to old man Monks! That you, Monks? This is Mr. Branson speaking. I've changed my mind, Monks. I'll take those ties!"

And the deal which the scrap of paper represented, still remained — *unfinished business*.

## THE DAY-DREAM.

BY SARA H. KEMPER.

BRAND new, shiny, big and splendid—
Left the works a week ago;
Now just notice, when I move her,
Never knock or pound or blow.

Here we're steaming from the roundhouse
Through the yards, to take my train;
Glossy mail, express, and Pullman—
Think I seem a little vain?

Well, you'd be stuck up yourself, too!
It's a pleasant sort of pride:
She's *my* engine, now! I'm sitting
In the cab, on the right side.

Steam is rising good and steady,
Fire is drawing hot and clear—
Pshaw! I'm nothing but the hostler
And here comes the engineer.

# DOUBLE-BREASTED MIKE.

BY CHARLES W. TYLER.

**Trouble? Grief? They Sure Landed on Extra West 2633 When Mr. DeVarney Hopped the Hack.**

YOU can't blame a man for the name he's got. It's something that was foisted on him without his knowledge or consent, and in later years, if he discovers that it is all out of plumb with his ideas of things, why, the only alternative, outside of trying to make the court understand what an obstacle has been placed in a gent's pathway by its application, is to shape the spelling of it in so polished a manner that its own father wouldn't recognize the new-formed appellation.

Without his knowledge or consent Aristarchus M. Devanny was so christened.

Now, the only fault we find with Aristarchus is that sometime in the early days of his manhood the good old Irish name of Devanny became far too plebeian for the rest of him, so, upon reaching his majority, and starting out to set the world afire, or be fired, he resolved that he would sever old ties and associations to the extent of adopting a "DeVarney" version of the family handle.

He did.

Too, at about the same time he came to lose considerably in the line of more or less enthusiastic friendships along the way. When *Devanny* became beneath his station, Aristarchus cast asunder the good will of a lot of boys down on C Street, who found it hard to maintain a state of friendly neutrality.

Like many another good man, Aristarchus M. wanted to get into something *big*, and where there would be a chance to start in about one notch this side of general superintendent. But when he discovered that a lot of these positions farther up the scale were already taken, he at last consented to make a stab as low down in the tide as a railroad brakeman—or just plain "shack," if you choose.

Thus it came to pass that Aristarchus M. DeVarney was marked up on the "slow" board at Hudsonville on the Midland. Of course, with the distinct understanding that at the earliest opportunity he would immediately be set up to that high vantage point for which he was qualified.

You surely couldn't expect a DeVarney to linger long in the ranks of the Brotherhood of Trainmen

Right here it is our wish to point out the fact that a liar or a bluff is walking in where angels fear to tread when he goes monkeying with a railroad. You understand, perhaps, what we mean.

When a con coons the crummy he wants to know if it is a vet outfit he has with him, or one made up about half of hams and students, who sure do exhibit a tendency to hatch out grief galore on a freight train, or in a fair to middling man-size yard some place.

When the car captain tells a member of his crew to take a couple of guns and a fusee and run like blazes and flag the eastbound beyond the crossover, he wants to be fairly sure that the gent isn't going to become all balled up to the extent of getting run over by his own engine.

Now the fact that truth is one of the fundamental principles of railroading was something that Aristarchus failed to grasp right off. With the gentleman there had been the tendency to tell things as they were not, apparently contending within himself that exaggeration was a virtue rather than a failing

And he was only human, at that.

If he had seen the lily of his heart home, and had bade her a formal and gentlemanly farewell at the gate, far be it from him to let it pass at that; he did just naturally have to tell the boys next morning how many sweet, maidenly kisses he stole.

If Aristarchus had a job, and by the sweat of his brow was poling down six dollars on Saturday afternoon, he must spread the good news that he was unhooking fourteen iron men per. Or if he had been on the work two weeks, and a newcomer came, the time of his seniority around the shop was maybe three years, going on four.

And so on.

Be it understood, however, that not always did Mr. DeVarney get away with this stuff. Far from it.

In fact, here lies the point where a lot of his troubles did blossom forth.

Naturally, they had to bud on something simple and unsophisticated like a railroad, for instance.

It matters not just how Aristarchus M. DeVarney lingered through a brief three-trip period. Be it sufficient that he did

Also, may it be explained that at no time was he referred to as *Mister* Aristarchus M. DeVarney, as plainly enough he so introduced himself.

What the railroad men with whom he came in contact called him is a delicate matter which it is best that we do not make public.

However, as you follow the career of Mr. DeVarney you will probably draw your own conclusions.

"Bull Durham" Jimmie Swift, call-boy at Hudsonville, came out of the telegraph-room at the station with the "makings" in one grimy fist and the call-book in the other. He took the first corner on one wheel, backed the base of his spine against the rail of the banisters, and clamped flat-footed down the stairs, steadying himself as best he could the while he builded a smoke to cheer him on his weary way.

Of course it had to be that it was a short call; the board was low and nobody with a phone-connection with their rest up yet. Instead, a long shag for a ham fat-head that was probably not to home anyhow, but roughing it at a movie some place, and the gracious, good Lord only knew where.

Be it understood that it is strictly against the religious principles of a call-boy to hurry at any kind of a speed that is going to cause him to pause and get his second wind. Not him.

However, there must, we know, be exceptions, but we haven't met him yet; either he has been a worldly-wise prodigy who has reached that stage in his youth where he believes it indicates weakness and fear of superiors to hurry, or he has been so old and bunged up from his attempts to battle life that he couldn't shake a leg if he wanted to.

We will have to hand it to Bull Durham Jimmie, nevertheless, for maintaining a dignified pace that, if nothing else, was remarkable for its seeming fixedness of purpose.

Jimmie never worried for fear he couldn't get his man in time. If the crew was late—well, he always made the faithful attempt to have them sign up according to his time, which was usually most accommodatingly about fifteen minutes slow. And sometimes that let him out a heap—those times when he got away with it.

In due time James arrived at that part of town where Mr. Aristarchus DeVarney had taken up abode, and made known his presence after the manner of call-boys—by entering promiscuously and unannounced whenever and wherever doors were not locked and barred; always he hoofed in like a gomodon into a tea-room.

There being no Yale or Corbin dofunnys or anything in action to halt his advance, and remembering the general direction of Mr. DeVarney's quarters from a previous visit, Jimmie made his way hence with due hurrah-for-Hull, and entered into the privacy of Aristarchus M. about half-way between the closed season and September Morning.

"Want you," chanted Jimmie, wasting no time on formalities, but coming right down to business with the turning of the knob, "for an extra west. Engine 2633. You're going light.

"Nine-thirty out of the house, and it's nine-thirty now. You're late right this

minute, so look alive and take 'er on the hot-foot. Adorn your carcass and fly down over the hill and swing 'em up at the West Yard bridge. They are short a head-end man, and they will be looking for you. Sign here!"

Mr. DeVarney's mouth sagged slightly, the while he contemplated the youth before him with both anxiety and bewilderment. It would seem that something was expected of him at this ungodly hour of the night. So it did appear

"Now just you hop to it," the call-boy was saying, "because if you ain't waiting for that light hitch when she comes whooping up the pike you are going to reap for yourself a whole pile of sorrow when "Bray Ham" Bramman starts. He'll trace your ancestry for nine hundred and ninety-nine years back of Darwin. Oh, man!"

"I—I guess I'd better not go," decided Mr. DeVarney at length. "I'm not ready or anything, and I I wouldn't want to keep them waiting, for, as you say, it might make them mad, and I'm not feeling well in the first place. I—I've got a toothache."

And Mr. DeVarney grabbed hopefully at the side of his face. However, Jimmie Swift had traveled far, and Kingdom of Job only knew where there was another shack.

An unholy light flooded the gray eyes of the Bull Durham Kid. Huh! A bird in the hand is worth two on the spare list.

Neatly folded in array over the backs of two chairs was a double-breasted suit of blue serge. The trousers, creased and shapely, here, and the coat and vest there.

Upon this array of gentleman's attire Jimmie pounced, and forthwith began the task of getting Aristarchus M. DeVarney into it posthaste.

"Oh, you're going, all right, all right," he assured the doubtful brakeman. "I ain't shagged off up here for nothing, bo —anyhow, this is a gentleman's job you're going on to-night, and you'll want to look cute and businesslike, so you'll maybe get by as a *real* railroader

"Go on, fasten 'em up That's the eye! Now, how about a shirt. Oh, Johnny! A striped sport!

"Ain't she a daisy? A lu-lu!

"And a nice, brown dicer for a Kelly, and you are all set—a sight for sore eyes, by gorry. All right, come on. Here, take your glim."

And in a manner gorgeous to behold, Mr. DeVarney stumbled away from the pleasant lights of his boarding-house into the gloom where lay the noisy, fearsome mysteries of a railroad night.

He didn't want to go; he was entirely distrustful of the whole business. Of course the presumptuous person who had so unceremoniously butted in on the prospects of a fine night's sleep might mean well—but it *did* seem that he maybe had carried things a little bit too far.

And yet on second thought—this, perhaps, was the very opportunity the gentleman who had hired him had told him to be on the look out for. It might; who knew?

The more he thought of it the more possessed he became with the idea that after all there possibly was something deeper in this plot than he had first sensed. Slowly Mr. DeVarney reached a new view-point.

One of many, and a call-boy had been rushed forth after *him*. Again, and this same young gentleman, as he understood it, had set out to make it plain that it was best that he appear on the scene of activities in something better than the customary plebeian get-up. It was, also, apparently important that haste be a necessary factor.

Maybe, thought Aristarchus, bursting into a reckless rosary of day-dreams, some of those men I worked with yesterday told the president how good I was, and he has asked that I have something better right away. However, Mr. DeVarney did remember that these gentlemen of the rail hadn't seemed to talk in that encouraging manner at the time he was demonstrating his talents.

It matters little, that in his honest efforts to stop that wayward Extra 2633, Aristarchus swung up a high-iron varnished hummer coming out ahead of the light engine and buggy, and had to run for his life when the eagle-eye of said purple train discovered what was hindering him, or that he tried to become an honorary member of a switch-engine's crew.

The principal idea is that at last he did finally become affiliated with Extra 2633, although when her headlight poked around the bend he was waving his lantern on the east-bound instead of the west-bound iron.

"Horseshoe" Bill Sykes had his eye out for wild brakemen, so tickled the air and waited for the gentleman without to come forward.

And then there appeared, stepping carefully over the ties into the spot from the headlight's rays, a vision for the gods—Aristarchus M in a double breasted, blue-serge suit, sport-shirt and brown derby, going railroading with Horseshoe Bill pulling the job, Bray Ham Bramman, captain of the cars, "Gooseneck" Mahon shoveling smoke, and "Cauliflower" Stork keeping up appearances at the tail-end of the hitch.

The dome of the '33 suddenly emitted a series of short, muffled murmurings that might have been either manifestations of uncontrollable grief or glee.

Bray Ham poked his head out of the cupola of the hack, glimpsed the newcomer on the bend; then shouted at Horseshoe Bill:

"Tell it to get aboard the hack; I don't want to get it dirty the first thing."

And then to Cauliflower, camped comfortably below:

"Man, be prepared! If I ain't horribly mistaken we are going to have a head shack with us this trip who looms on the horizon like the leading lady in the Battle of Tentpole Crossing."

Aristarchus M. received the good word from Horseshoe Bill and toddled along toward the rear end of the crummy. Here he paused; then reached forth a gentle hand for the old wagon's grab iron.

Up ahead Mr. Sykes glanced back with an evil eye; then hooked a grimy left paw on to the throttle and opened it about sixteen notches, eased it in and jerked it back again.

"I'll teach Style Headquarters to mince around all night getting aboard!" he said, addressing nobody in particular. "He'll shake a leg if he stays long with this wall-eyed outfit."

At that moment Mr. DeVarney was shaking two legs. They were stretched right out straight behind him, while the only thing that maintained Aristarchus as a member of the crew was a fist that still clutched the old Lizzie's grab iron. The first thing the newcomer had done was to let go of his lantern, which now bounced merrily along the ties, hopped into a muddy ditch, sputtered and went out.

It was by word of mouth that Bray Ham and Cauliflower were attracted without. In spite of the disturbing effects of momentary loss of equilibrium themselves, due to the '33 trying to imitate a scared jack rabbit, Bray Ham and Cauliflower flew to the rescue with remarkable promptness.

They hauled Aristarchus in about three seconds before he decided to let go, and thereby saved the hitch a brakeman. Bill Sykes would never have stopped.

Bray Ham cleared his throat—and looked Mr. DeVarney over, the while Cauliflower assisted at prinking the gentleman up again. Then the car captain smiled sweetly at Aristarchus—a little too darned sweetly any one would have said who knew the con—and said:

"Is that the way you always coon a crummy, son?"

Aristarchus blinked owlishly. It was a new language; he didn't follow, and before he could make reply Mr. Bramman was requesting further information.

"What's your name?" he asked.

"Mr. Aristarchus M. DeVarney," said the newcomer, with as much dignity as he could muster under the circumstances.

"Mister *what?*" demanded Bray Ham, cocking his round, fat face at a slight angle, and squinting at Mr. DeVarney with strangely freshening interest.

"Aristarchus M. DeVarney."

"That's a hang of a name! How do you spell it?"

And the new railroader spelled it for the gent.

Mr. Bramman snuffed with slight exaggeration, then cast a downcast eye in the direction of Mr. Stork. The latter personage had a sudden inspiration.

"What's your *middle* name?" he asked.

"Michael."

"Aristarkachoosus Michael De—De—

Varney," said Bray Ham. "H m! *De-Varney. Michael Devanny.* Double-breasted suit.

"Gosh, man, something about you has got to be normal. You can't railroad proper otherwise. No, sir!

"Cauliflower, you witness the fact that I do hereby christen this marvel—for the good of his soul Double-Breasted Mike!

"Mike, how long have you been railroading?"

A preponderance of events had beset Mr. DeVarney since that moment when Bull Durham Jimmie first entered his life. There had been just one thing after another, and there was no sign of a lull.

And yet, regardless, there predominated in the brain of Aristarchus the old state of mind -what you lack in experience make up in bluff; be an old-head around the works if it takes a leg; be a man of the world if you have to grow an eyebrow under your nose.

Even when the whole world was rampant before his eyes in a teetering swirl, a state that was in no way minimized by the manner old Horseshoe Bill was pasting the '33 around the bends, Aristarchus M. remembered that if he wanted a start he'd better lay it on thick.

Anyhow, at the present moment it seemed that he had been railroading that long. The past was far away.

"Twelve years!" he said.

Bray Ham took out a startlingly beautiful blue handkerchief and scrubbed sweat beads, imaginary or otherwise, at the back of his neck. Cauliflower went to work feverishly on a smoke for himself.

Neither spoke for a time.

"Where?" said Mr. Bramman, staring straight at the roof over Mr. Stork's head. The interrogative was almost unutterably grim in its brevity.

But the newcomer was not to be caught napping—not exactly. Somewhere, sometime, he had heard or read of a Northern, and it seemed that the road was very far away. Yes, he believed that it was a railroad, although it might have been a hotel.

Anyway, he wanted to name a pike. as he thought, so far away that these home guards wouldn't have ever heard of it. Then, too, when he did something wrong there would always be the excuse that it had been done as they pulled the stunt where he came from.

"The Northern," said Aristarchus M. DeVarney.

"Northern what?" insisted the car grabber

"The North—Northern Kansas City."

Cauliflower gulped, and thereby nearly swallowed a fiercely burning coffin nail.

"Too bad it wasn't the North Grove Street Morgue!" muttered Bray Ham.

But Aristarchus was installed. He was a bird in the hand, and the job did just naturally have to carry a shack. The specimen, to be sure, was not very promising, but it was the best they had, and better than none—and, after all, the poor fish *might* have had experience some place. He might!

Many rail-lengths were laid behind them, the flag provided the new man with another lantern, and talked to him like a brother concerning what probably would be expected of him, Bill Sykes hunched his old evil nut over the arm-rest and wished eternally that he did have an Atlantic type hog for about ten minutes instead of a grass-hopping old freight walloper that bulled along at best about forty miles an hour slower than he would like to pull the shebang, while Bray Ham Bramman went out on to the rear piazza and tried to pick his horoscope from the stars.

Like the old pig-eye, the con could smell trouble coming a mile off. Somebody had wished on to them a horrible example of the student species, and this one was worse than the rest, because it professed otherwise and was an awful liar anyhow.

It takes little to jinx a freight hitch, and there was a hoodoo riding right now. Cauliflower sensed it; the con *knew* it; and Horseshoe Bill MacNamara Sykes was looking for it with a grouch a foot thick all over him.

At Island Pond a red-eye on the order board nailed the '33.

"All right," said the con, picking up a lantern and addressing his remarks to the rechristened Mike, "we'll go see what's doing."

They did, and found plenty.

The despatcher had been waiting half an hour to hear the Island Pond man say, "Here they come." According to the dope, some dejected drag over fourteen hours on duty had staggered into town with about three hundred tons over tonnage and a leaky whale and all the luck in the world against them, and the gent in the train delayer's house of cards had taken it upon himself to direct that they set off their mess of grief long-coming, hitch on to the buggy and for the love of Mike see if they couldn't hook enough life into their old tea-kettle to get 'er in before the hog-law tied the can to their pestiferous carcasses.

"And where the great horn of clay is this string of affliction located at?" Bray Ham wanted to know, lifting up his voice in grievous strains. Already he had visions of *about* where this drag would be, especially since he had a ripe-green shack to gum up the plot of getting organized.

The operator was half apologetic.

"They had to back their string across the road," he went on to explain, "and shove 'em down No. 2. The west-bound yard is plugged tighter than blazes. Everything is plugged to-night."

"You said something!" swore the con. "And if I ain't mistaken you, or the next guy on a trick in this here wart of misery will have a story to tell that old woman in the front office."

"Oh, yes," the operator was saying, ignoring Mr. Bramman's outburst. "I forgot. There is a dead engine in there on two ahead of 'em, and a couple of cripples blocking the west end, draw-bars out of them, they tell me."

The con spat effusively, and having got a load out of his cheek, was primed for oratory.

"I smelled it, by Judas!" he yelled. "I got a whiff of it when we was coming through Otter River—that there was just such a dad-blasted connivance of sin laying for us *some* place this gosh-foozled night!"

He looked around for Aristarchus, but that gentleman had tacitly withdrawn from the immediate center of the scene to a position outside of the operator's window, where he could see and hear just exactly as well, and without being in range of any of that volatile blackstrap juice with which the con was punctuating his remarks, or other false movements that the irritable Bray Ham was delivering himself of.

"And me wrastling fifteen hundred and fifty tons with a wandering gazabo who has got George M. Cohan beat eighty-seven ways for get-up—a poor itch that is either loose all around or a liar by the clock.

"You mark my word, O. R. T., if there ain't something worth looking at around here in the next half-hour I'm a Chinese dish-washer. You hear me?"

The op said he did, and Mr. Bramman went out and told the story to Bill Sykes, who came down through the gangway and gave the con the silent grip of understanding and sympathy.

"Across the road on two," murmured Horseshoe, "with a cold, black lily blocking 'em on this end and a couple lungers up yonder. Ham, could you probably guess which end of them cripples ain't got any draw-heads?"

"Yep," said Bray Ham solemnly, "the end we want to hitch on to."

"There ain't any need of us to go and look, is there?" the hogger wanted to know.

The other shook his head.

"Nope!" he growled, expectorating politely into a grease cup that Bill was monkeying with, "there ain't. Some weehawking son-of-a-gun has hung us a horseshoe upside down."

"And if we try to pull 'em out up this blooming grade there will be some more cripples, by the horn of Maud," Mr. Sykes voiced the opinion. "If this old ruin can start fifteen hundred and fifty ton anyhow; I don't believe it.

"Beside, that Gooseneck can't read figures on a gage up to a hundred and eighty; if he can I ain't ever seen any indications of it since he's been firing for me."

"Well, blabbering around here all night won't get that drag switched out," the con interrupted impatiently. "Squirt some juice into her works, and tell Mahon he'll have to flag the east-bound while we go across the road, which leaves me and this—this—er—

"Say! Where the Hades did that shack

go now? Holy Sambo, I've lost him before we get started, and he had twelve years' experience."

The con found his man in the telegraph office telling the brass-pounder of his railroad experiences on *six* different roads, and that soon he expected to be general manager or something on the Midland.

Luckily for Michael there were two doors to the telegraph office, one leading direct from the outside and one leading via the waiting-room of the station. Bray Ham came in through the first and Aristarchus went out through the other.

"I'll general manager yer, old Sookey Dooskins!" bawled the car general. "Railroaded on the Kansas City Steer Line, I guess! I'll railroad yeh!

"Now, you purified picture of health, you get over there and be ready to let us across the road.

"I'm going back to that telegraph office and give that blasted despatcher a tune before he starts yelling what to heck we are doing here all the night. Any darn fool gang can come along and smear a yard all to gracious, and Ham Bramman pokes around a bend and is the goat.

"'What are you doing there the last four hours?' I'll tell 'em. I'll have a story for 'em.

"Go ahead, Bill! This living flower will line the iron for you to get over.

"And here! Yey! You, Mike, pay attention! Pull the pin on the buggy, and put a binder— Pin! Pin! You nut! Pull it!

"We ain't going to take the crummy with us while we're switching 'em out.

"Far-r-r-r-ther-in-law! He don't know what a *pin* is!"

At this happy juncture the operator stuck his head out of one of the windows of his bay.

"Holy cats!" he called, "you guys have got to get a wiggle on if you are going to pick up that train. No. 293's return is coming, and they want the road; they're on short time. Just left Hudsonville."

"S-shure, Absolam, my son!" groaned the sensitive Bray Ham, tearing toward the buggy to make the cut himself, "and Eleven will be on top of us, and the Eighteens, and, if the Lord ain't kind, the newspaper train in the morning, before we are ready to pull out of this burg."

And to the hogger, who was looking at the lubricator, or lighting his old TD or something:

"Go-o *ahead*, you old square-head! Man, gadfrey, can't you see me out here toddling this lantern for half an hour?"

Then to his man Friday:

"Give that hand-brake a twist before the crummy runs over us."

And continued, addressing Aristarchus from a distance of about an eighth of an inch, as the double-breasted gentleman hopped down from winding the buggy's brake:

"You see that switch there? Right down there—right in front of your nose, got a light on to the top of it, red and green?"

"I getcha," said Mr. DeVarney, having got a little of his breath and some of his courage back. "What do you want done to it?"

"Listen, Mike!"

The con plucked at the lapel of the gentleman's coat, emphasizing his remarks by shaking it firmly after each period.

"We're going across the road after about a millions cars. The first thing you do is throw that switch. I'll get the one on the west-bound, and when the engine comes back past you, why, you just throw it back.

"Then we will get the next one up, which will let us into the yard, where we have got to switch a dead hog out of the way that some brain-squat pugwallopus had to go and shove right in behind that canned string.

"Now, are you set?"

Mike said he was, and started for the aforementioned switch. The con hooked on to the back of the tender and gave Mr. Sykes a "go-ahead" motion.

They pulled up and cleared the crossover, and Mr. Bramman performed at his end; then waited for the winking green below to come red.

There was a pause, which quickly became prolonged—but there was no sign of life, other than the steady gleam of a lantern, from that point where Mr. DeVarney

was supposed to be engaged in getting a switch over.

Bill Sykes hung out of the cab and swore, both at Bray Ham and Double-Breasted Mike, and in his own behalf Bray Ham returned the compliment, waltzed around the switch stand on one foot to get a start; then headed down the line, talking to the gods all the way.

"What-is-it? What-is-it?" the con bellowed, defying the world that he had weak lungs. "What in the name of kindness are you doing, just spending the evening?"

Then suddenly he pulled up to get a better picture of Aristarchus by lantern-light, standing dolefully beside the switch, his glim on the ground beside him, his cute, brown derby shoved distraughtly on to the back of his head, the while the gentleman himself, with a methodical precision that was maddening, searched through the many and various pockets of his double-breasted suit.

"I—I guess I left my switch key in my other clothes," he explained at last. "I guess I must have; I ain't got it here."

"You guess you did, hey?" roared Mr. Bramman, snapping open the lock with his own key and jerking the lever over so savagely that he "like to bu'sted it."

"You guess you must have, do you? Well, jumping Je-e-mimy Christmas, I'd hate to tell you what *I* guess."

Bray Ham was swinging his lantern wildly. He let up on Michael for an instant.

"Come on! Come on! Ye-e gods' You old goat mauler, you move as if you had one foot in the grave!"

Herewith the hogger more fully caught the spirit of the thing, and the old '33 came crashing back in a manner that threatened to put her on the ground, tender, drivers, and ponies.

Bray Ham, living well up to the name that had been given him, again turned to Mr. DeVarney.

"Shack without a key! Cat without a tail! All alone in this wide world—and Island Pond plugged tighter than a bung in a vinegar barrel! Oh-h, boy!"

"But wouldn't I be all right if I had a key?" Double-Breasted Mike wanted to know, feeling within himself that perhaps he was slipping so far as that general manager job was concerned. "I know the railroad part pretty good; I can throw switches and everything."

"E-e-e-e-e-e!" gnashed the con, legging it up the line in pursuit of the lumbering freight puller. "I'll bet you are a beaut when you get started! My-y gadfrey, I'd plumb like to see you when you're in your prime.

"But whatever you do, don't let nothing happen to them clothes, and, gosh-almighty, I hope your morale ain't all shot to Tophet before I can get you back where you come from. I wouldn't teach your innocent soul any sin for the world. No, s'r!"

Finally, and after considerable language in the line of arguments advanced, pro and con, Mike secured the loan of Bill Sykes's switch key, although the objections offered by this gentleman were of their nature broad and elegant.

Horseshoe Bill's key was on a patent ring with the family bunch, and being a "safety first" affair, the bit of circular steel refused to operate, so far as releasing one of its long-secured associates went. And in final exasperation the hogger at last thrust the whole jangling bunch into the hands of his head-end man.

"Go ahead," he fumed; "take 'em all. I can't get the blasted thing off. But may the Lord help you if you lose 'em.

"There's keys on there for the front and back door and locker an hens' mash bin and the cellar and the garage and my ottermobile. I'm ding-busted if I ever did let a tawny-headed Swede take 'em before, and blessed if I know what you want a key for now

"It seems like everything pretty near around this jassack town is unlocked by this time."

And Double-Breasted Mike and Mr. Bramman went out into the night to further their earlier attempts at getting duly organized.

The reason, it was found, why the dead loco had been shoved in front of the canned string was that there was no other place where it would clear. Accordingly, the only chance of getting it out of the way was to

put it on the east-bound main iron beyond the cross-over, until the fifteen-hundred-and-fifty-ton drag had been pulled out and backed across the road, when the old lady could be switched back to her sweet repose in No. 2.

Carefully Bray Ham explained to Mike the manner of procedure.

" All you got to do is take this old lizard out and pull the pin, uncouple 'er, when the hogger spots her, and throw the switches going out and coming back, while I go down the line and see if we are all hooped together and how.

" After railroading twelve years do you think you can do that without stewing us up any more grief? Har-r-h?"

Aristarchus thought he could follow those simple instructions.

The '33 backed on to the deceased sister and started out with her in tow, in charge, so to speak, of Double-Breasted Mike, while Bray Ham plodded into the night in the opposite direction, looking over his newly acquired train.

In due time the cold hog was on the east-bound, resting content, and the No. 2633 was back on the head pin of her train in No. 2. From the far end of the yard Bray Ham, through the medium of light, explained that all was well, while Bill Sykes personally attended to the hose coupling between the head car and the tender; then set the '33 to work pumping 'em up.

And the moon smiled down and everything was lovely.

When all was ready, Bill Sykes became almost exultant at the thought of the fair, clear prospects ahead only to pull 'em out and back across and onto the buggy; then shove the dead one in again, get on to the train and whistle in the flags.

Sweet as a daisy.

Queer, isn't it, how a little bright weather will freshen a man's spirits?

" All right, there, son, we'll see if the old mill is going to start 'em."

Carefully, while the pumping up of the train line was in process, had the eagle-eye builded as pretty a fire as one would wish to see under the lady's crown sheet, and now the pop was purring with a white feather at 'er dome.

With the Johnson bar down in the corner, and his hand on the throttle, Horseshoe Bill noted for the first time that his head-end man had closed the main-line switch behind them when they came in after leading the defunct hog out.

" Hey, there, feller!" yelled Mr. Sykes, immediately losing some of his sweetness, recently acquired. " What did you shut that gate for?"

" What gate?" said Mike.

" Switch, you blind, blithering nut!" hollered the goat cracker, resorting to his former peevish state. " Now you run open it like the hammers of Hinnom."

And without further thought of Aristarchus clogging up his mind, Bill Sykes turned his attention to the art of getting that fifteen hundred-and-fifty-ton drag rolling. If luck was with them they could get out of Island Pond ahead of Eleven; but if things broke against them it meant wo galore—getting their buggy off the west-bound, getting the dead bruiser out of the way of 293's return, and getting out in the clear themselves.

Things looked bad for a little. Twice the big '33 had to ease back and get a bunch of slack, but the third trial she started them all

Exultantly Horseshoe Bill cracked a brief *toot-toot* from her whistle. Happy days, they were all coming—no lungs, no " bu'sts," and the goose hung high.

The engineman turned his eyes ahead where the twinkling red of a clear way on to the main should have shown at the switch. Instead, however, he caught the flash of green

Savagely he cracked two other blasts from the dome. He had got that blasted train under way only after the niftiest manner of jockeying; to stop might spill the beans indefinitely.

Holy Moses! What *was* the matter with that sap-headed shack? Bill lifted up his voice, and, take it from any one who knows the Bill Sykes's type, it was some uplift.

If it hadn't been for the fact that every instant of his time was needed putting sand under the '33, and easing her throttle in and out, Bill would have himself tore ahead to assist at the operation of getting that

confounded gate open in front of the big hog's ponies.

In those few, tense seconds, Horseshoe did everything but shed tears. He appealed to friends and relatives on both sides of the River Jordan for a little luck, and the things he requested be done to Mike were fearful to the uttermost. But for all the gentleman's oratory it was wasted breath. Double-Breasted Mike just could not seem to get that switch open.

Mr. Sykes crowded up as close as he dared to; then shut off and set the air. Then got down on to the ground — and went forward in third.

"Man, Peter, children of Israel, what in the name of Ann McCloskey did you shut that switch for when you knew that we were coming right out. Holy Pat! Open it, you farmer—open it!"

But Mike was not trying. Another trouble had beset him. Again he was diligently searching the secure recesses of that double-breasted suit—for Bill Sykes's precious keys.

The switch was locked.

The working of the human brain is problematical. It was in the hogger's mind to take Aristarchus and drape him over the upright staff of the switch by the seat of the gent's trousers.

Only that wasn't horrible enough, the eagle-eye decided when he realized his complete helplessness in the situation. This fiendish thing in the form of man had locked 'em in—and lost the key, *his* keys, "ottermobile" key and all.

Mr. Sykes looked at the switch and gave it a kick; then he looked at Mike—and Mike moved back into the blackness.

"Closed and *locked* it!" sobbed Bill Sykes, clenching both hands and reaching them out toward the heavens, as he bared his teeth in a fiendish grin. "And lost my keys! *Pow!*"

Mr. Sykes moved again in the direction of Aristarchus, while in turn Mr. DeVarney moved, and only left his little brown dicer, which Bill picked up and crowned over the switch lamp with the top of it sticking through the sleek-lined derby.

Wildly the hogger rushed back toward his engine, and rang in a riot call on the whistle cord, which sounded like a towboat whistling for a draw and an S. O. S. at the same time.

Already Bray Ham had sensed something out of gear, and was coming over the top as fast as he could for the big feet he had. Six cars up he got down on the ground where his brogans could get a better grip and the gentleman himself could put more enthusiasm into the thing.

While he was yet eighteen car-lengths off, Bill Sykes told him what was the matter. Bray Ham understood and stepped on another speed, and had hard work to stop at the switch, only he fell over Mr. DeVarney on the ground looking for Bill Sykes's keys.

It was just as the con got the gate open at last that far to the westward sounded the shrill, wailing blast of a freight engine. Seemingly it, too, was in distress.

"No. 293's return," moaned Mr. Bramman. "Back up; we've got to go get that old hog out of their way."

Further difficulties appeared here The yard at Island Pond is in a slight sag. Enough of the train in the siding had been on the far slope of the dip to help the hogger to start, but the slight advance that had been made hadn't shifted the balance enough to help the gentleman go the other way.

The old No. 2633 couldn't back 'em an inch.

The con pleaded and swore and even pushed, but there was strictly nothing doing. The train from the west answered the '33's flag, picked him up and crawled into the block and up to a point within a hundred yards or so of the slipping, wheezing, snorting hauler trying to crowd her drag back where it came from.

With Mahon from the direction of the newcomer came the other job's head-end man.

"What do you say?" he bellowed at once. "'No. 293's return is right behind us, we want to get in and let 'em by."

"Well, there ain't no room here!" howled Mr. Bramman

"Then we'll go across the road, and if that old junk-pile down there"—indicating the dead engine—"belongs to you, I'd ad-

vise you to take care of it just as quick as you can waltz your rambunctious bulgine after it.

"'Pink 'Lemonade' Charlie Clause, trainmaster on this here pike, by gosh, is right out on the pilot of the return hollering his head off for the road, and they got a traveling hogger in 'er shanty writing things down."

Mr. Bramman looked hopelessly in the direction of the No. 2633; then sopped a load of sweat from his brow, and swiped his lantern back and forth for the benefit of Mr. Sykes.

"'Hoa!" he yelled. "'Hoa, you old fool! What are yeh trying to do?"

Came a voice from near the ground fifteen feet away:

"Right here some place I must have dropped 'em."

"Simon Peter! Dropped what, in the name of Hobson?"

"The keys to the fellow's hen-house, an'—and that switch key and his automobile—"

"Keys! Keys!" shrieked Bray Ham. "He's looking for some gracious, loving old keys, and the whole Midland is getting balled to hang and gone at Island Pond.

"Never mind them gosh-awful keys, man. Pull that head pin, you soup-eater, and tell that wild hyena down there to let up mauling that goat; we've got to take that confounded other teapot and go across the road with the rest of these bull-ramming idiots."

Coming up-stage here another nerve-wrought member of the cast tore into the scene. It was the brass-pounder. He had glorious news.

"An Extra 2426 is coming ahead of No. 11; the despatcher wants to know what we can do with them. He says to plug Eleven to-night means shot at sunrise. The old man's car is on behind."

"Oh, let 'em all come!" raved Bray Ham. "What do we care? La-la! La-la! Maul-gad-cripus—"

"And the despatcher says," the operator was still chanting, "if Ham Bramman hasn't got out of here yet, and there ain't no room in the yard that they'll have to back across the road, but for Heaven's sake look out and don't stick it into No. 293's return, because there isn't any engine to take the job out to-morrow afternoon.

"And here's a wire from the old man, and he says if Island Pond ain't straightened out when Eleven gets here, somebody is going to answer to him, and I guess probably from what the despatcher was saying that Bray Ham and Bill Sykes both was going to be made an example of, because there wasn't no need of taking all night to pick up a train and get out of here.

"The second-trick man says you two old women gummed the whole business, and if you don't get thirty days it won't be because the super ain't mad a plenty; so if I was you I'd take it and wouldn't try to blame it all on to your head-end man."

That the operator ducked saved the Midland a perfectly good lantern.

Bray Ham was dumb, only a gurgling noise came from his half-open mouth. He glared about him. He knew the Midland's super of old, and what that old Tatar couldn't say to a man wasn't worth noticing, and on top of it all he would slap over a thirty to sixty-day lay-off without batting an eye. Oo-oo-o!

"Look it! I've found them!"

It was the soothing voice of Double-Breasted Mike.

"I guess I must have left them right here beside the switch. Here's your keys, engineer."

In that instant wild and seething emotions again welled into being in the heart of Horseshoe Bill Sykes. He forgot his calling, he forgot No. 293's return and the extra ahead of her, he forgot Extra 2426, and he forgot No. 11.

Aristarchus must have sensed the thing that was coming. He dropped the hogger's keys and started west; he took the cross over and sought the firm, hard cinders between the east-bound and the west-bound main. He discarded his coat and stretched his neck far out of the collar of his wonderful sport shirt, and just ran.

And in the order of their coming so short a span behind him was Horseshoe Bill McNamara Sykes, hogger, out of luck, and Bray Ham Bramman, car doctor of the light hitch that plugged Island Pond.

# SLIM SLIPS THE STAR READER HIS.

BY WILLIAM H. SEYMOUR.

**It Was Coming to Hadje, Steering a Member of His Own Circus Outfit Against the Gyp.**

RED is one inquisitive guy. They ain't no two ways about that, I'll tell th' world. Ya never know what kinda questions Red is goin' ta heave at ya; an' seein' as how me an' him is pardners, he most gen'rally always gives me the first chance ta come forward with th' answer fer his quiz stuff.

Here's one he tosses at me one swell summer mornin' w'ile me an' him is framin' up th' juice-joint next ta th' ducat wagon. We has th' lemonade concession with th' Armor Plate Circus, ya know.

"Slim," he says, da ya know anythin' about stars?"

"Surest thing," I tells him. "Stars is show folks what has learned ta eat pie with a fork an' has coin enough ta pay alimony an' grab off a temper'ment an' a press-agent for their selfs."

"Nix," Red tells me. "Not them kind, I don't mean. What I means is th' twinkly, sparkly kind."

"Like when ya get a clout between th' horns?" I asts him.

"No'" he yells, an' his nanny climbs up an' dents the' ceilin'. "Whada ya tryin' ta do, kid somebody round this outfit?" he asts me, like somebody had been feedin' him raw meat again.

"Clam yerself, Red," I says; "clam yerself; maybe ya mean th' kind of a star like they puts on Christmus cards, with three guys on camels chasin' it?"

"What I mean," Red tells me, "is regular, honest-an'-truly stars like ya see at night when yer sober."

"I get ya now. What about them?"

"Well," says Red, "da ya s'pose some wise *hombre* could tell ya what kind of a wiff yer goin' ta grab out, jest by slantin' at th' stars an' doin' some 'rithmetic?"

"Red," I says, "Kink Solomon held th' world's championship fer peddlin' out wisdom, but take it from me, if ole boy Sol was alive ta-day an' could talk United States, he couldn't tell *me* what kind of a wiff *I* was goin' ta grab off. I'm off th' love stuff fer life. I'm away from th' frail sects ferever. Th' only kind I likes is blondes, an' blondes is deceitful

"One time I fell fer a blonde like Anthony dropped fer Cleo Patrick, an' even if she did toss me, all th' rest of th' frail ones looks like steerage passengers 'longside of her, an' I wouldn't even leave them sew a button on fer me. I'm away from th' weddin' chimes ferever

"But it's different with you, Red," I says. "It don't take no wise guy nor any dope on th' stars ta tell what kind of a Jane you're goin' to join out fer better or worst, because you're sucker enough ta drop fer any Jane

"An' it will be th' first one who makes up her mind to stand th' exquisite agony of gazin' on your funny-lookin' mush three times a day across th' table. Don't ferget; them is true words, Red," I says

Red don't try ta put no alibi over on me, because I have th' goods on him. An' me, I don't think nothin' more about stars till a coupla days later. Then I gets a peek at Red palaverin' with a coffee-colored geek what has long, black whiskers an' hair down his back like a female woman

"Who's yer fr'en'?" I asts Red when he drifts over ta where I'm mixin' lemonade at the juice-joint.

"That's Hadje," Red tells me; "he's a Persian prince, or somethin' like that."

"If that guy is a prince, Red," I says, "I'm th' Duke of Harlem. What's his graft?"

"He joined th' outfit a coupla days ago with a joint what he calls 'Th' Scrolls of Fate.' He reads th' past, present, an' future fer two bits a smash, an' th' hicks is fallin' fer it like bricks off a chimbley."

"With that make-up of his," I says, "he ought ta be dealin' out Injun blood bitters. Them whiskers reminds me of when I trouped on th' Kerosene Circuit with a rep show. In 'Jesse James' I ued ta hide be hind a set of whiskers like Hadje's when I tended bar in th' second act.

"An' that hair driftin' over his shoulders," I says, "reminds me of a movie queen what th' hero guy has jest saved from th' crool waves. He must be a nut ta wear his hair like that when he ain't workin' his act."

"He is sure proud of that hair," says Red, "an' I guess he's a nut, too, Slim"

"Everybody in th' show biz'ness is queer, Red," I says.

"All except you an' me, Slim," he tells me.

Red was mostly right about that, except he pulls some queer stuff hisself. I could see right then that Hadje had him all steamed up about th' Scrolls of Fate, so it don't su'prise me a tall when Red uncorks this one that swell summer afternoon.

"Say, Slim," he asts me, "what's a horrorscope?"

I see it's up ta me to come ta th' front with a blame-fool answer to a blame-fool question.

"Red," I says, "a horrorscope is a dis ease. Th' front part of th' word is plain English an' th' last part is Latin an' means 'to see.' Th' whole word means 'ta see horrors.' Da ya get me?"

"I sure do," says Red: "It must be a disease like th' D. T.'s. Ya ain't givin' me a bum steer about this word, are ya, Slim?"

"I may be wrong," I tells him; "I never wrote no dictionary like Daniel Webster did. Where'd ya hear it, anyways?"

"Hadje tole me he'd give me one fer a case note," says Red, "but I ain't sucker enough ta pay no guy fer ta give me a disease."

"What's th' idear of this horrorscope thing, anyways?" I asts him next.

"Hadje says I'd have ta have this thing so's he could tell me about what kind of a Jane I was goin' ta draw."

"Lean off this Hadje person, Red," I says. Take it from me, he's a weasel."

Well, ta make a long story short, I drifts around ta Hadje's joint myself jest ta give him th' up an' down, so long as I'd heard so much about him.

He's got his head wrapped up in a rag they calls a turbin, an' between his whiskers an' th' hair down his back, he's got more alfalfa in his make-up than would stuff a mattrass.

Another funny thing about this bird is he don't wear no pants like a regular guy. Instead, he has got hisself all wrapped up in one of them kimoner things like a Jane jumps inta when she dashes outa bed in th' mornin' ta give th' milkman a bawl-out about somethin'.

Hadje has a little tent all to hisself, where he works this Scroll of Fate graft. In front of th' joint they is a big banner with a pitcher on it. It's a pitcher like what ya see in a almanac book—a guy what is busted open, an' all around him in a ring is a bunch of animals like goats, bulls, sheeps, and lobsters.

I oozes inta the astrology-joint, an' all I see is a coupla rolls of wallpaper with a bunch of Chinese shorthand written all over them. Maybe it wasn't Chinese, but I'd be willin' ta bet any part of a thin dime that I could tear a hunk outa them rolls and draw a shirt or two outa any laundry where th' heathens deals them out

When I asts Hadje what's th' idear of th' wallpaper, he puts me hep that they is th' Scrolls of Fate, an' th' secrets of th' past an' future is all writ there. I ain't superstitious, or nothin' like that, but when Hadje tells me about th' stars an' figures, I'm wonderin' if they is anythin' in it.

It's a cinch that we are all born under the stars, they ain't no two ways about that; an' figures don't lie. Two an' two is four every day in th' week; they ain't no gyp there.

Hadje sees that th' idear has oozed inta my hatrack; so he heaves this one at me:

"Wouldst know thy future wife, son?"

"Wouldst not!" I says. "I'm off th' stuff."

"Hast thou been crossed in love?" is th' next one he uncorks

"Not crossed," I tells him; "double-crossed!"

"Th' heart of thy heart may return," he says, "even as the bul-bul returneth to its mate."

"Where da ya get that bull-bull stuff?" I growls, gettin' ready ta bash him one on th' beak.

"Bul bul," he wises me, "is Persian fer nightingale."

"That kid sure could sing," I says. "Ya oughta hear her go through with 'Silver Threads.' But that bull-bull chatter don't listen good. Lay off that Persian conversation, or they might be accidents.

"Now let's get down ta cases. How much dough do I have ta part with before ya peek in th' dim an' distant future an' find out if that nightingale of mine is comin' back ta me?"

"Is it worth two dollars?" he asts me.

"It's worth an arm if the answer is right!" I tells him, an' I separates myself from a coupla iron boys.

"In what month was thy heart's desire born?" he wants to know.

"December," I tells him

And then he wants ta know when I busted inta this vale of tears. When I tells him that, he says I'm under the influence of Taurus.

Right there is where the bristles on my back begins ta rise I don't like ta have *no* guy say I'm under the "influence" of *nothing*, because that's what th' judge says when yer full of booze. I wants ta see what this coffee-colored mutt says I'm full of, so I says:

"What's this Taurus stuff? Come clean, ya fish, or I'll take ya apart an' ferget ta put ya together. Is this some more Persian chatter?"

"It's Latin," says Hadje, gettin' kinda nervous.

"Latin fer what?" I says.

"Fer bull," he says, an' he points at a pitcher where all them animals is in a ring.

Sure enough, there is a pitcher of a cow's husband with his Latin monniker underneath so's that they'd be no mistakes.

What happens? Everythin'. No guy that ain't a cripple is goin' to leave any one tell him to his face that he is full of bull. That's what Hadje pulled on me, even if he did say it in some foreign chatter

I makes a swing fer this Persian bird an' misses him. He can't run very good in that kimoner thing, and I'm behind him like his shadder when he tries ta lose hisself in th' crowd. I unbuckles another wallop, an' after that I don't remember nothin' except I missed again.

When I comes ta life, I'm layin' under a tree an' Red is sousin' me with a bucket of th' prohibition fluid

"Was it a Zep'lin, or jest a earthquake?" I asts him

"It came near bein' murder," he tells me. "Th' crowd sees ya take a swing at Hadje. They see his long hair an' his kimoner, an' they think he's a Jane. Every hick in th' crowd was a hero and took a slam outa you before they got hep that ya wasn't mixin' it with a woman."

Can ya beat it? Lookit th' beatin' I gets fer *missing* that bird. I wouldn't of cared if I'd of landed on him. As it is, I got a coupla eyes that'll be black, blue, an' green in th' mornin'. Every tooth I own is so loose that I'll be eatin' soup fer a week; an' I don't like the soup that th' bum cook with th' Armor Plate peddles out, because it don't match my vest, an' th' stains shows up like th' ten of diamonds in a spade flush.

When I tells Red why I tries ta take a poke at this bum star-reader, Red gives me th' ole raz

"You're a fine little guy ta peddle out advice," he tells me, kinda sourcastic like. "Ya tells me ta lean away from this star dope an' this future-wiff stuff; then you, th' wisenheimer that never falls fer no sucker games, goes against this Scroll of Fate gyp like a hick from the tall sticks."

"Red," I says, "soft pedal on that kinda chatter, or you an' me is liable ta get in a jam. I only got time fer one jam at a time; an' right here is where I takes one of them Eyetalian oats of revenge, only I ain't goin' ta use no banana-knife on this

Hadje person. A knife or a gat is too quick, an' ya can't hurt a guy enough that way.

" What I wants ta do is ta take this bird apart with my hands, an' take a coupla hours ta do it. Then I'm goin' ta wreck that Scrolls of Fate joint so bad that they won't be nothin' left of it 'cept th' holes in th' ground where th' tent-stakes was."

I don't get no chance ta tell Red th' rest of th' things I'm goin' ta do ta that coffee-colored gorilla, because Hadje busts inta th' scene with a coupla corn-fed tin stars. Seems he's been an' gota warrant fer ta chuck me in th' village cooler just because I took a coupla slams at him an' *missed*. I s'pose if I'd of reached him, he'd of wanted ta have me boiled in oil or somethin' like that.

Anyways, I don't get pinched because th' old man comes ta th' front an' squares me. Then he tells me ta lay off of this Hadje person, or I'll be canned out of th' Armor Plate aggregation ferever.

" It was your fault in th' first place, Slim," th 'old man tells me.

" I know it was, gov'ner," I tells him. " I was an awful sucker ta miss him when I swung."

" That ain't what I mean," says th' old man. " You've been troupin' with a show long enough ta know better than ta go against any kinda fortune-readers. Hadje was to blame too, because you, bein' a member of th' outfit, he shouldn't have steered you against the gyp and separated ya from th' two bucks."

" What about him callin' th' cops?" I says. " Can't I take a coupla wallops at him fer that? Who ever heard of a circus trouper asting a cop ta fight his battles? Why don't he stand up like a regular guy an' give or take a beatin'?"

" I gave him a bawl-out about callin' th' dicks," th' old man says, " an' now you lay off th' rough stuff. Understan'?"

Then I oozes out of th' old man's dressin'-room an' wises Red ta what came off.

" Well, Slim," Red says, " I guess them Eyetalian oats of yours will have ta run fer Sweeney."

" Maybe," I says; " but th' old man only barred th' rough stuff. I'm goin' ta get this Hadje guy someways, no matter what th' old man says or what th' Scroll of Fate says, either."

" More power ta ya!" says Red. " Every guy in th' outfit is sore on him because he run fer a cop ta settle th' battle. They ain't a guy in th' trick that 'll talk ta him, but th' Janes are strong fer him. They say you're a roughneck what is always longin' fer a jam, an' that Hadje is a ' perfec' gentleman ' because he refuses ta ' degrade ' hisself by mixin' it with you."

Red was right. Hadje is a skunk with th' boys, but he's th' Arrow-Collar kid with the queens. One Jane symperthizes so hard that she falls in love because she " understands " him.

Of course, Marena didn't tell every one that she's in love, but when a Jane says she understands a guy, take it from me, she's in love. I know.

Well, Hadje is welcome to join out this Marena queen because she ain't my speed a tall. She's got short, red hair an' green eyes — blue-green, like th' spoons in th' cook-tent.

Besides that, she's thin enough an' homely enough ta get herself a job savin' souls in Chinatown, if she wants to. Ya wouldn't think from that description that Marena pulled " The Dance of the Seven Veils " in th' black tent, would ya?

Them seven veils is all she wears, an' she sure could get th' natives all steamed up, dancin' like a whirlwind an' rippin' off a veil every now an' then, till she gets down ta th' seventh. But w'ile th' hicks is waitin' fer her ta shed th' last veil, *bam!* out goes th' lights an' th' show is over.

Sometimes I use ta wonder what kinda riot they would be if some unscrup'lous person was ta go South with one of them veils when Marena wasn't lookin, so that when she got down ta sheddin' th' sixth veil she'd think they was another under it. But it seems Marena counts them veils w'ile she puts them on, because one day she finds somebody has copped one, an' she is mad enough ta chew flat-irons when she thinks of what might of happened when she shed th' last veil, thinkin' she was wearin' seven.

When she gets hep that Hadje is wearin' th' missin' veil fer a turbin, she fergets her vows of love an' tears inta him an' claws

him up like she knew "what made th' wildcat wild."

Hadje beats it through th' menagerie, an' when he sees Marena on his trail, he climbs inta th' cage where they is a coupla young Siberian wolves. When Marena pulls up in front of th' cage, Hadje is on his knees with a wolfy's head tucked under each arm so as they won't chew him up.

Marena calls the star reader a whole lota things, an' she chucks sticks, stones, mud anythin' she can find, she pegs through th' bars at him.

Hadje cusses in some strange chatter, an' once in a w'ile he spits out an English word like "swine," pig," an' "cow."

Marena lamps around fer more ammunition, an' she finds some bushes growin' under th' wolf-cage. Them bushes has more burrs than a hen has feathers. She picks th' burrs an' pegs them one at a time inta Hadje's whiskers.

He raves an' shakes his head so hard that Marena's veil what he is wearin' fer a turbin falls off an' leaves his hair down. Marena smiles when she sees that an' pegs away with th' burrs. Hadje can't use his mitts because he's still lovin' that pair of wolfies.

S'help me, I think Marena must 've chucked a coupla pecks of burrs inta Hadje's alfalfa before th' old man wafts around to put th' brakes on th' hilarity.

Marena busts inta sobs an' shows th' old man th' seventh veil what the star-reader had been makin' a turbin outa.

"Tut, tut," says th' old man. "Nix on the briny stuff; it 'll wash all th' powder offen your nose. This Hadje guy is canned, gated, excommunicated; an' just as soon as we can pry him away from them playful little animals, we'll run him off th' lot for pullin' that veil stunt."

I has somethin' ta whisper in th' star-reader's shell like lug before he gets th' bum's rush, so I edges in close ta th' bars.

"Listen, ya Persian goriller," I says in one of them low, tense whispers like they uses in mellerdrammers, "why didn't ya give a look in th' Scrolls of Fate before ya tried ta put somethin' over on me? If it says in them scrolls that a tall, dark guy about my build copped Marena's veil an' switched it to where you hang your turbin—well, it might be true, an' it mightn't be. Anyways, it won't do ya no good to squawk, because I have an alibi framed, an' th' old man don't believe in no Scrolls of Fate."

Hadje don't tarry long enough ta utter a squawk, he's afraid Marena might take another whirl outa him. Even if th' old man had of got hep to me switchin' th' veil, he couldn't of kicked, because he only barred th' rough stuff when he told me to lay off Hadje. But s'pose Marena ever got hep—oh, boy!


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**A FOUR-PART STORY—PART TWO.**

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

WHEN Albert Quayle died, he left his fortune of four million dollars to his orphaned granddaughter, Inez Braddon, whereabouts unknown. Marsden, his attorney, engaged Peterson, an attorney in a city where he thought the girl might be, to search for her. He found her working in a department store, informed her of her good fortune, and asked for proofs of identity. She told him she had photographs of her parents, her birth certificate, *et cetera*, at her boarding-house. Peterson went to the house to get these things, but they had disappeared. Another man had called to see Inez, but had not found her in, and had been left alone while the landlady was busy in another part of the house. Peterson believed that the man had stolen the proofs for some purpose. He set his man-of all-work, Jack, an ex-pickpocket whom he had reformed and employed, to follow him. Jack trailed him to a hotel, and ascertained that he was registered as Henry M. Dryden, of New York.

Accompanied by the chief of police, Peterson called on Dryden, and searched the man's suit cases, but without finding the missing property. Dryden identified himself as a representative of Quinn & Maxson, theatrical agents. He said that he had sought an interview with Inez to offer her an engagement.

After Peterson and the chief had gone he opened a false bottom in one of the suit-cases, and took from it the photographs and documents Peterson had come to find.

Two operatives of the Quigley Detective Agency, who had been retained by Peterson to go to Albany, one of the places where Inez said she had lived after the death of her parents, and check up her story, went to New York instead, and reported to Quinn & Maxson, after which they reported to Peterson that they had found no proof that Inez had ever lived at the places where she claimed to have lived.

Two detectives, Laura Dryden, an actress, Quigley, and others were involved in a conspiracy to obtain for themselves possession of the Quayle millions by substituting Laura for Inez, the real heir, and Laura had been carefully coached for this rôle.

Dillingham, a lawyer, had been retained by Quinn & Maxson to carry out the robbery in a legal manner. He called on Peterson, and arranged for an interview between Peterson and Laura.

Peterson, being unsatisfied with the report of the Quigley operatives, asked the chief of police to lend him one of his men to go over the ground, and check up on the report of the Quigley operatives, and the chief sent one of his best men.

Dillingham appeared at Peterson's office, accompanied by Laura Dryden, whom he introduced as Inez Braddon. She claimed to have, at her hotel, proofs of identity, letters, with those that had been stolen from the other girl, and in response to a question denied that she knew Dryden. She acted her part well, but the look in Peterson's keen eyes terrified her.

## CHAPTER VIII.

RIVAL CLAIMANTS.

"I CONGRATULATE you upon coming into such a fortune!" Peterson said evenly, his eyes still mocking her. "It is a fortune such as few young women fall heir to offhand."

"Well, is there anything more?" Laura asked in voice which she controlled with an effort. "If there isn't I should like to go. I am getting a little tired."

"Just one thing: Will you kindly let me have your stage name and the addresses where you lived in New York."

"Laura Arnold," she said; and she gave him five addresses.

"When you went to New York you were, of course, Inez Braddon," Peterson said in a voice of velvet. "Did Laura Arnold come into the world overnight or was there a slow absorption of Inez Braddon by Laura Arnold."

"I—I guess I—I don't quite get you," stammered Laura Arnold.

Dillingham stirred and coughed.

"I will try to help you to get me, Miss Arnold," said Peterson, still in that velvet voice. "What I mean is this: Were there any persons in New York with whom you associated who knew you as Laura Arnold on the stage and as Miss Braddon in private life?"

"No, I guess not. I just went to New York and got a job on the stage and told them I was Laura Arnold. They don't care what your name is if it sounds good."

"And Laura Arnold sounded good?"

"Well, they let me use it without asking any questions."

"I think that will be all till this evening," Peterson said, rising.

The girl stood up quickly with a gasp of relief. Peterson bowed them out.

"Oh," said the girl in the hall, "don't let that man get at me too often. He'll break me. Why, you'd think you had a window in your chest when he looks at you!"

"You did very well till you began to talk like yourself," said Dillingham. "He said he congratulated you."

"You're an old fossil, Dillingham!" said Laura angrily. "Didn't you see he was kidding me."

In his office Peterson was striding back and forth across the room. His hands were clasped behind him and his head was bent, but his eyes glowed.

"It's a game of some sort," he told himself. "That girl is marked 'counterfeit,' just as plainly as Miss Braddon is marked 'genuine.' Well, I'm getting my stride."

He felt that his next step was to trace the career of Laura Arnold as far as he could from the information he had. He could not ask the chief for further help just yet. He would rather have one mission well filled than two poorly done.

After half an hour of thought he stepped into his car in front of the office building.

"Home," he told the driver.

When he reached home Peterson went to his library and sent for Jack, the former crook, who came promptly, mildly expectant. He was getting used to his employer's eccentricities, and he was always ready for any request or order.

"They say it takes a crook to catch a crook, Jack," Peterson said. "Is that true?"

"A man who's been through the mill learns a thing or two, that's true enough," Jack answered non-committally.

He sat on the edge of his chair, a small, wiry man, whose face was hardened by many an adventure in the underworld. He had quickly moving eyes that seemed to take in everything that was within their range, and yet to be in readiness to observe anything new that might happen — especially that might seem to indicate hostility.

His posture gave him the appearance of being ready to spring. He appeared alert, aggressive, and physically fit.

"I'll tell you a strange little story," Peterson said.

He related the story of the Quayle bequest, the disappearance of the papers, and the claims of the two women. A hard smile was playing over Jack's thin lips when the lawyer had finished.

"It's a frame-up," he said.

"Of course it's a frame-up," Peterson conceded. "But who's in on it? Who's doing the framing?"

"It's a cinch that the whole bunch except the first lady is crooked," Jack said.

"Except the chief of police, too."

A kind of covered fire glowed in Jack's eyes.

"Him?" he said. "He's as crooked as they make 'em. Just because he's the chief don't make him straight. I know that guy!"

Peterson laughed. He knew how Jack hated the old chief.

Jack had told him before that the chief and his men had "framed" him oftener than they had proved his guilt. Peterson ascribed Jack's present accusation to that smoldering hatred and let it go at that.

"I want you to do a little work for me on this case, Jack," Peterson said. "But I don't want you to let any preconceived notions get into your way.

"I mean I don't want you to start with your mind made up that anybody is crooked. You understand?"

"I understand," Jack answered. "But I know what I know."

"That's all right," Peterson agreed, "so long as you keep what you know to yourself. Knowledge sown broadcast isn't worth much in this kind of business. I want you to keep a stiff upper lip. Don't talk unnecessarily. If you help me out, I'll make it worth your while."

"You won't owe me nothin'," the former thief said.

"I want you to go to New York and see what you can find out about a girl named Laura Arnold," Peterson said. "Here are five addresses. Go to each of them and ask all the questions you can think of. The least important question may help you the most. Get back as soon as you can. If I want to get into touch with you, I'll wire you care the telegraph company in New York. You can call them up from time to time. Now, be careful. You'll find that this will do you a lot of good, Jack. You'll feel better for working on the right side of the fence. Get started as soon as you can."

From his home Peterson drove to Inez Braddon's boarding-house

"I had a call to-day from another girl claiming to be Inez Braddon," said Peterson

"An adventuress!" said the girl.

"She claims to have proofs of her identity."

"Proofs? What kind of proofs?"

"Identically the same as the ones that were stolen from you."

"Then you must be on the track of the thieves," Inez said.

"That is what I think, but it may be very difficult to prove it. I dislike to have you come into contact with these people, but it seems quite necessary that you should meet this young woman. Did Mr. Quayle have any other relatives besides your mother?"

"None. I am his sole surviving relative. Do you mean this woman resembles me?"

"Hardly 'resembles.' She is a counterfeit of you somehow. One not much of an observer might confuse you. She has a remote resemblance in feature, a trick or two of expression and manner that suggest you. It is the same resemblance that a vulgar copy might bear to a great picture, if I may say so"

"And she claims to be the daughter of my mother!" said the girl, with a touch of anger showing in her eyes. "What is it you wish me to do?"

"This young woman is staying at the Wilton Hotel," said Peterson. "I am to meet her this evening. I wish you would call a cab at seven-thirty and be at the hotel at eight o'clock. Go to the parlor on the second floor. I will call for you there when I want you. I trust that you will not feel that this is too hazardous, Miss Braddon."

"I am not afraid," the girl said in a low voice.

As his fourth decisive step of the day Peterson presented himself at the Wilton Hotel a few minutes before eight o'clock. He had a feeling that he had done a fairly good day's work so far. He had started Jack on an underground trip, and he was about to see just how much nerve Miss Laura Arnold had. If he could not break her down, he felt that he could, at least, form a pretty good judgment of her.

He sent his card to Dillingham, and the boy escorted him to Dillingham's room. The old lawyer had one of the best suites in the hotel. Peterson glanced about it quickly. He was quite well aware what Dillingham's status in the law must be. He hadn't made enough money in the last fifteen years to more than support himself meagerly, Peterson was sure. This luxury was beyond his means. Laura, in the nature of things, had no money of her own as yet. Somebody must be backing them. Peterson smiled as he treasured that in the back of his brain.

"Well, sir," said Dillingham in his cheerless way, "you wish to see Miss Braddon?"

"If you please, we will call her Miss Arnold," said Peterson. "For the time it is necessary for me to refer to the other young woman as 'Miss Braddon.' To call your client by the same name might be confusing."

"It can make no difference before the law," said Dillingham with a shrug. "Do as you like. Shall I summon my client?"

"If you please."

Dillingham asked for the young woman on the telephone. In a moment there was a

light knock on the door. Dillingham opened it and bowed Laura in.

Laura had gowned herself according to her rôle. She wore a dark skirt and a white shirt-waist. She was guiltless of ornament. But Peterson noted three things: She had had the services of an expert coiffeur, an expert manicure, and an expert masseuse since Peterson had seen her last. Her hair was glossy and was smartly dressed; her nails shone a little too brilliantly, and her skin was like satin.

Peterson rose and shook hands with the actress. He smiled down at her as he held her hand. She looked up at him somewhat doubtfully. She had admitted to herself all afternoon that this was to be an ordeal. Peterson had the power to make her decidedly nervous, and she had never known a man before him who had that power.

"Great expectations," said Peterson good-humoredly. "Little foretastes of luxury."

"What do you mean?" the girl asked.

"I compliment you on the simplicity of your garb," he laughed. "It is quite in keeping with the part. But I see you have employed artists whose services I understand are dear to the feminine heart."

"I—I don't quite—"

"—don't quite get me?" Peterson said. "Well, never mind. I was only joking, just as I would be joking with Mr. Dillingham if I spoke of the elaborateness of his quarters. We lawyers usually have to practise more economy."

"You're too deep for me," said Laura, with a 'helpless glance' in Dillingham's direction.

"If my learned brother has had his little jest, I would suggest that we proceed to the business that has called us together," said Dillingham heavily.

"Miss Arnold has the proofs with her?" Peterson asked.

"I have them," said Dillingham, and he opened the drawer of the writing-table and drew forth a package

On the table he presently spread two photographs and two papers. Peterson bent over them in silence. Dillingham sat down. Back of him Peterson could hear the quickened breathing of the girl. Subconsciously, as he gazed at Laura's proofs, he congratulated himself on having made her a little afraid of him.

One photograph was of cabinet size. The woman whose face looked up from it was undoubtedly the mother of the girl Peterson knew as Inez Braddon. He was sure she was not the mother of the actress sitting behind him. The second picture was extremely puzzling. It was that of a girl younger than either Inez or Laura. It had some of Laura's personal characteristics; some of Inez's. It was as if in the picture something had been added for Laura and something taken away from Inez. One paper was the marriage certificate of Miss Braddon's mother; the other a copy of the birth-certificate of Inez Braddon.

"Will you excuse me a moment?" Peterson asked when he had finished his scrutiny. "I shall be back at once."

When he had left the room, Laura relaxed in her chair.

"What's he going to pull off?" she breathed. "I'm afraid of that man. He's too smooth for you, Dillingham."

"Hush! Walls have ears!" Dillingham whispered.

Three minutes passed and there was a rap on the door. As before Dillingham opened it. Peterson stood aside and ushered Inez into the room. He followed her quickly and closed the door.

Instinctively the eyes of the two women sought each other. Inez was self-possessed, frankly curious. Laura was hard, suspicious, and ready to be resentful. Laura felt herself at a disadvantage.

"This is Miss Braddon," said Peterson.

Dillingham bowed and Laura murmured. Inez looked from one to the other steadily. Peterson walked to the table.

"Will you examine these documents and photographs, Miss Braddon?" he requested.

The girl approached the table and bent over the exhibits. Her eyes went first to the picture of her mother.

"That is my mother," he said. "And that"—her finger was poised above the photograph of the young girl and hung there—"that seems like a photograph I had taken four years ago, but it is not the same. These"—doubt was creeping into

her voice—" these papers are like mine—the ones stolen from my room—but they are not identical." Again her eyes went to her mother's photograph. " That is my mother,-of course. But the photograph is not -"

" Pshaw!"

Peterson whirled about and Inez turned more slowly. Laura had risen and was standing just behind them. The two young women were face to face as Inez turned.

" What's the use of keeping up this farce?" Laura demanded. " Of course none of those things ever belonged to you. Why should you keep on pretending that they ever did? I give you warning that I shall not stand for this much longer. I am Inez Braddon, and I can prove it in more ways than one. I posed for that photograph four years ago. Let Mr. Peterson take the photographer's name. He can easily learn whether I am telling the truth. The photographer who took my mother's picture is dead, but his successor has the plate from which that photograph was taken. Let Mr. Peterson inquire from him also. Mr. Dillingham, is there anything more to-night?"

" We are still at Mr. Peterson's disposal," said the old lawyer.

" May I take those pictures and documents?" Peterson asked.

" I shouldn't wish to let them pass from my possession," Dillingham said with a suavity he had not shown before.

" I will make a note of the photographers' names, then," Peterson said.

He did so and turned to Inez

" We may as well go," he said.

Dillingham bowed them out.

" Well?" Inez said, for the first time in a shaken voice.

Peterson laid a gentle hand on her arm.

" Don't worry," he said. " We are coming along, all right. Go home. I will see you in a day or so."

In the lobby down-stairs he wired the names of the two photographers to Jack, and told him what information he wanted. Next day at noon he received a telegram which would have read like this, if Jack had been a little more skilled in grammar:

First photographer says he took picture four years ago. It's Inez Braddon. Known at the time as Laura Arnold also. Other photographer says he has plate from which Mrs. Braddon's photograph was printed. Photograph was secured from him four years ago by girl giving name of Inez Braddon. Says he would know Miss Braddon if he saw her

And Peterson wired back:

Send second photographer here at once.

## CHAPTER IX.

### IDENTIFICATION.

THE man whom the chief of police had sent into the East reported to Peterson the second day after the lawyer's interview with Laura Arnold in the presence of Inez. In the mean time there had been a few developments of minor importance. Peterson had taken pains to see Laura twice in the interim. He disliked to be in the position of hounding a woman, even in this mild way, but he had begun to perceive that some kind of chain had been forged about Inez Braddon, and he believed this girl to be the weakest link. He was sure now that Laura was no more heiress to the Quayle millions than Inez was an impostor. Laura bore the indelible mark of the woman who has had to live in a measure by her wits, who has known what it is to strive and struggle to make both ends meet. And Peterson saw that she had not the strength which would always make her fight fairly.

Much, in Peterson's mind, depended upon what the chief's man would have to say. His report would bear the imprint of authority of officialdom. There would be no chance for the sharp practises which private detectives now and then engaged in.

The detective was a lithe, quick-moving, alert young man, with a pink complexion and curly brown hair. He had a bright, frank smile, and his eyes were steady as, seated opposite the lawyer, he met his gaze.

" As honest as the day," said Peterson to himself, " and keen." Aloud he said. " Well, what did you discover?"

The young man laid the report of Quigley's operatives on Peterson's desk.

" I ain't strong on those private sleuths any more than the chief is," he said. " But

this is one time they delivered the goods. If I was going to make a written report I would say just what Quigley's men have said."

Peterson stared at the young man in dismay. The report was disconcerting, to say the least.

"You went to all the addresses, both in New York and Albany?" Peterson asked.

"To all of them."

"And you found no one who knew Inez Braddon"

"Not a soul. And I guessed they talked more freely to me than they did to Quigley's men. You see, one inquiry for a person don't arouse much curiosity, but a second does. People know there's something out of the ordinary going on when two men come hunting the same girl within a few days of each other. That's only human nature. So these people all loosened up and racked their memories for me. But it didn't do no good. They recalled all kinds of people that had lived with them, but never a one like this girl you're trying to hang something on."

"I'm not trying to hang anything on her," Peterson said. "I'm trying to help her."

"Oh, excuse me!" said the detective. "Is that all, sir?"

"That's all you can do, I guess," Peterson answered with a sigh.

The detective left. Peterson sat staring at nothing. He was completely mystified. Certainly this policeman had made a complete and honest report. He had gone into the case without even knowing what Peterson's attitude toward the girl was. He had thought the lawyer was "trying to hang something on her." That showed he had worked with only one object in his mind: To find out what he could. And he had found nothing that, to say the least, would avail Inez anything.

On the heels of the city detective came the photographer Peterson had ordered Jack to send to him. Peterson's secretary brought in his card. With a little rise of hope that this man might help to disqualify Laura, Peterson had him admitted. He was the ordinary type of professional photographer—suave, smiling, anxious to please.

"A rather unusual man brought a message from you to me day before yesterday," the photographer said. "I came to see you because he was able to show me a telegram from you. Of course I had heard of you, Mr. Peterson."

"I am informed," said Peterson, ignoring the flattery, "that four years ago a young woman secured from you a print of a photograph of Mrs. Braddon."

"That is what your agent wished to know. I told him that I had made such a print. My records show that. Yes, sir, I made such a print."

"And you would recognize the young woman who purchased it?"

"Unless she has greatly changed. I deal in faces, sir, and nature has to make great changes to prevent my recognizing a person unless there has been a great lapse of time. One interview with a person is sufficient to print that person's features on my mind. I can close my eyes and marshal hundreds of faces before me, and tell you whose they are. I do not wish to boast. It is my business."

"You would recognize the young woman, even after the lapse of four years?"

"Easily. Even after ten years, at that period of a woman's life."

"Could you spare me an hour of your time?"

"Certainly, sir, if I can serve you."

"Then come with me."

They drove to Inez's boarding-house. Peterson placed the photographer opposite the door so that he would be confronting Inez when she entered.

"I am of the opinion that this is the young woman," Peterson said. "Of course I want you to be entirely frank, even if it is not she."

In a moment the girl appeared in the doorway. She looked inquiringly from Peterson to the photographer. The latter merely glanced at her, and then he turned to Peterson

"This is not the young woman," he said.

Peterson was getting used to developments of this kind. Every hand he played seemed in some mysterious fashion to be "topped." But he was learning to take his defeats with good grace.

"This is the photographer who made the picture of your mother four years ago," he told the girl. "I brought him here to see if he could identify you."

"Identify me?" Inez exclaimed. "Why, how could he identify me? I have never seen him before to-day."

"On that, my dear young lady, we are quite agreed," the photographer smiled.

"But Miss Arnold claims and the photographer backs up the statement that Inez Braddon got a print of Mrs. Braddon's picture four years ago—got it in person," Peterson said.

"I never got such a print from any one," the girl said. "My mother gave me the only picture I ever had of her."

"I can only tell you that a young woman who said she was Miss Inez Braddon came to my place of business four years ago and asked for a print from the plate of Mrs. Braddon's photograph," the photographer declared. "She said she was Miss Inez Braddon. Whether she was or not, I can't say, of course."

"I am Inez Braddon," the girl said in a kind of helplessness. "There are not two of us, both genuine, surely, and I know I have never seen you before."

Peterson rose.

"That will be all just now, Miss Braddon," he said. "I want to take this man to see Miss Arnold. I will see you again."

The photographer passed into the hall. Inez laid her hand on Peterson's arm. He stopped and looked down into her anxious face.

"Suppose," she asked, "that this man should say Laura Arnold was Inez Braddon—what then?"

"He can't say that," Peterson said. "He can only say that Laura Arnold is the girl that came to him four years ago and represented herself as Inez Braddon."

"But don't you see," the girl urged, "that that will only add to our mental confusion. Why should she have passed herself off as me as long ago as four years? My grandfather was alive then. He had not relented toward my mother. None of us, and consequently no one else, dreamed that he would ever relent toward his daughter's child. I wasn't of sufficient importance to tempt any one to masquerade as me four years ago."

"I have thought of all that," Peterson said. "But if Laura Arnold did masquerade, as you, she had some object. We will have to find that out. We will have to be patient and just go on working."

"But the skein seems to be becoming more and more tangled the more we try to find an end to take hold of," she said.

"We shall find that end in due time," he said. "Don't grow anxious. You may need all your strength before we are done."

Peterson's car drove him and the photographer to the hotel at which Laura was a guest. She invited them up as soon as he had sent his card. She came down the hall to the parlor as they entered it by another door. Peterson saw her glance quickly at the photographer. The photographer was examining her closely—much more closely than he had examined Inez.

Peterson's heart sank. He foresaw that this girl, who was a child mentally as compared to himself, was about to score over him.

"Do you know this man?" he asked with a touch of anger in his voice.

The girl, with the quick intuition of a woman trained to watch for opportunities, saw she had a chance to match the lawyer in this one instance. She smiled with a look of suppressed triumph in her eyes.

"It 'd hardly be fair to me to let me answer that question, would it?" she said impudently. "Maybe the man isn't sure."

Peterson bit his lip. The girl apparently had moments when she was less superficial than he had thought her. He turned on the photographer.

"Do you know this young woman?" he demanded.

"I have met her," the photographer smiled. "I know who she said she was at that time."

"Well, is she the young woman who came to your office and said she was Inez Braddon?" Peterson demanded.

"She is that young woman," the photographer answered. "I would know her anywhere. You haven't changed any for the worse in four years, miss."

It was on Laura's tongue to tell him to

" quit his jollying," but the results of her constant drilling in her part were beginning unconsciously to restrain her.

" That's all, I guess," Peterson said.

" I hope you are satisfied now, Mr. Peterson," Laura said with twinkling eyes. "You know the lawyer down home wrote you and told you to find Inez Braddon. How long is it going to take me to persuade you I am Inez Braddon. I should like to have you for my lawyer."

There was a taunt in her voice, a mockery in her flippancy, that maddened Peterson. He had thought her rather ingenuous at first, but she was disclosing something of the woman who thinks logically at times in dangerous formulas. He had known that he had her at a disadvantage when he had confronted her with Inez, but now she had checkmated him, and she was courageous enough to take advantage of the fact.

" You have a lawyer at present, I think," he said. " I am only interested now in seeing justice done. If you keep on piling up proofs, I shall have nothing to do but withdraw."

" I don't blame you for sticking to your job, if there's any chance for you to win a lot of money for the pretty little girl you represent," Laura purred.

" Good day," Peterson said, and in spite of himself he knew that his cheeks were burning.

As he and the photographer stepped into the hall he heard Laura laugh behind them. He glanced back over his shoulder. She was standing in the middle of the room, her head tipped toward her right shoulder, and her lips drawn back in a mocking smile

" You little devil!" Peterson said to himself. " I wish you were a man!"

He reached his office in somewhat of a temper.

On his desk he found a memorandum that the chief of police wished to talk to him. He told the operator at his private exchange to call that official. When he heard the chief on the wire he spoke hopefully into the transmitter. He thought the chief might have stumbled upon some good news

" This is the chief," the gruff voice rumbled out. " We got that young fellah you been trying to reform—Jack Ransom. He wanted me to call you up and tell you. I'm doin' it as a favor to you, because I knew he was one of your bugs "

" What's he charged with?" Peterson asked briskly.

" Same old charge," the voice went on—" pocket-picking. We lifted him in the Union Station. It was funny. The man he touched was one of Quigley's operators. Quigley's man never tumbled till our man wised him to what was goin' on. Jack had the leather."

" I'll be right down," Peterson said.

He slammed the receiver on its hook. He told himself he had been a chump to trust Jack. The temptation, he might have known, would be too great for the former crook.

He started for the station.

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## CHAPTER X.

### JACK IN A BOX.

FIVE minutes before Peterson arrived at the station the turnkey ushered a man into a cell next to Jack's. Jack had been through this mill many times before Peterson had picked him up and tried to make a man of him. He was aware that it was an old trick to put a detective in the cell adjoining that of a prisoner to ascertain what the prisoner would have to say to any visitors. Therefore he was not surprised when the turnkey ushered Peterson up to the outside of the cell.

He saw that Peterson was angry. But he was more concerned with the man in the other cell than he was with his employer's emotions just then. With his finger on his lips he moved to the side of the cell farthest from the cell to which the man had been admitted a few moments before. Peterson regarded the movement with distaste. He was half inclined to think that Jack had fallen from grace and was maneuvering.

" What is it, Jack?" he demanded. " What have you been doing?"

Jack jerked back his head. Peterson looked at him closely. He saw that there was nothing cringing in the manner of the former thief. He was standing squarely on

his feet, his head lifted and his eyes steady and clear. Whatever he had been doing, Jack had not been drinking.

Peterson relented sufficiently to move close enough to the prisoner to catch his whisper.

"Never mind me for a minute," said Jack in a tone so low that the man in the next cell could not possibly hear it. "Let me give you the dope on my trip an' then we c'n talk about me. I think I got something."

"What is it?" Peterson asked eagerly.

"I got on the trail of this here Arnold woman like you told me," Jack whispered on. "She's nothin' but a cheap actress. I seen her kind many's the time before. She ain't no different from ten thousand others. Lived in same kind of places. Worked in bum shows mostly. Never was known as anything but Laura Arnold till two years ago."

"Two years ago? And then she was known as Inez Braddon?"

"Inez Braddon nothin'," Jack retorted. "She was known as Mrs. Henry M. Dryden."

"A showman?" Peterson exclaimed.

"One an' the same. A bum press-agent for a bunch of bum shows like the Arnold woman played in. He am't been around his hangouts in Noo York for quite a bit It's easy to see why."

"Why?"

"'Cause Laura has got some kind of game on, an' Dryden, for some reason or other, is layin' low just now."

"He stole pictures and papers from Miss Braddon," said Peterson.

"That's the lay, then," Jack said. "She's going to use them things, somehow."

"He's going to prevent Miss Braddon from using them," said Peterson. "That's the lay."

"Well, it's all in the game, anyhow. That's all I could get. I don't know if it's any use or not. Now, about me. They framed me, Mr. Peterson. I never was near that guy they said I had taken his leather off'n him. If I could get 'em ten feet away they never would have been any use in my takin' the chances I used to take. I was ten feet from him when the bull laid his hand on my arm. He called to this guy, and the guy came back, with his hand on his hip pocket. The cop asked him had he missed anything, and he said his book was gone. Why, it was the rottenest frame-up ever I see! The guy hardly waited for the bull to ask him if he had missed anything. He was right there to make his spiel, and he hadn't knew I'd taken the book till the bull asked him did he miss something."

"Do you know who the man was whose pocketbook they say you took?" Peterson asked.

"I never see him in my life before."

"He's one of Quigley's operatives."

"Quigley the special bull?" Jack made a gesture of untold despair. "Can you beat it, them people workin' with the department to frame a poor jay like me? What do they want to land me so bad for?" Suddenly his face brightened and his eyes narrowed. "Say," he whispered, "did anybody know I took that trip for you?"

"Not a soul that I know of."

"They did. They did. They found it out somehow. They ain't framin' me. They're framin' you, just like I told you they was. They think I got something, or might get something, an' they're playin' their cards close. They ain't takin' a chance on a thing. Say, you want to watch out. They'll be gettin' you first thing you know. They'll make about one proposition to you, and if you don't take it something's going to happen to you."

The mocking invitation which Laura Arnold had given him that morning rang again in Peterson's ears. Was it a veiled warning, somehow—the girl's invitation to him to become her lawyer? Had Jack really sensed some kind of a desperate situation in which the peril to himself and Inez would increase with each move he made?

"Just what do you imagine this frame-up to be, Jack?" he asked.

"I don't know," Jack answered. "But you can bank it's big—it's as big as all outdoors. Don't you trust nobody from now on."

"But I've got to trust somebody," Peterson objected. "I must have help in this thing."

"Can you get me out of here?" Jack asked.

"I'll get you out to-morrow when you're arraigned," said Peterson grimly. "You've displayed more sense than anybody I've talked to so far. I'll get you out on bail, at least, if it takes a hundred thousand in cash. I think I'm going to need you."

"Do it," said Jack. "You're going to need somebody."

Five minutes after Peterson had left the turnkey came down the corridor, rattling his keys. He unlocked the cell next to Jack's and let out the man he had lately confined there. As the man passed without, looking in Jack's direction, the former thief studied his profile.

"That ain't one of the department bulls," he said to himself. "That's a new one on me."

Peterson went to the chief's office. He was permitted to pass into the chief's sanctum.

"What have you got on Jack, chief?" he asked half angrily.

The chief looked up slowly. In his old eyes there was something which Peterson had never seen there before when the chief had looked at himself. He had seen that look there once or twice when lawyers had attempted to bulldoze the chief. It was an expression of anger, backed up by something that was infinitely more dangerous than anger.

"Don't use that tone to me," the chief said in a low voice.

"I'm not using any special tone," Peterson said, his anger mounting. "I'm the man's lawyer. I'm asking you a question."

"You can ask your questions in court."

Peterson regarded the chief in amazement. The official had always been his friend in his rather dull, official way.

"What's come over you, chief?" Peterson asked.

"You're talkin' to the chief of police in his office," the chief returned. "I don't like the way you put your questions."

Peterson controlled himself. The chief had the whip.

"May I ask what you have on the prisoner?" he asked.

"I told you—pocket-picking. Plain case. One of my men saw him take the leather. Took it out of his hand. The man your friend swiped it from was right there."

"Ten feet away," said Peterson.

"I'm not trying this case with you," the chief said. "You can try it before the court. But I tell you you're wasting your time. I know this man. I'm out to clean the town of his kind, even if he does happen to be a friend of the famous Mr. Peterson. He's a thief and a dope-fiend!"

"Dope-fiend?"

"Yes, dope-fiend! He's full of it all the time. He has hallucinations. We'll bring that out in court."

"Very well," said Peterson, and he turned away.

He went into the street, pondering this latest development. So that was the basis for Jack's belief that he was the victim, or was to be the victim, of a frame-up!

He was astonished he had never noticed that Jack used stimulants of any kind. He went over Jack's conduct, and in the light of the chief's revelation he found many strange beliefs Jack had held and expressed to him.

And yet—

He hastened to his office and called a physician, whom he knew well—a man who had made a study of drug addicts. He made an appointment with him for the next morning.

In his cell Jack received food at six o'clock. It was a limited amount of food, and it was not clean. As Jack raised some of it to his mouth he detected an odor in it. He had lived well at Peterson's. He could not eat moldy food. He put down his plate.

Half an hour passed. The turnkey came to collect the dishes.

"You better eat somethin', old top!" he said. "You won't get no more till mornin'. It's pretty good stuff."

"I ain't hungry," Jack said.

The turnkey went away. In half an hour more the door was rattled open and footsteps came down the corridor. Jack heard the turnkey talking roughly. The turnkey came opposite Jack's cell. He had a man by the arm. The man appeared to be very much intoxicated.

"Stand there a minute, you!" the turnkey said roughly. "Don't you move!"

The man lolled back against the bars of Jack's cell. The big door clanged shut. The man turned so that he could look in on Jack.

"'Lo, pal," he said in a small, cunning voice. "I put something over on them for a minute. But I guess he's goin' to search me when he comes back." He fumbled in his pocket and produced an envelope and thrust it through the bars. "Keep it for me," he said. "Don't you go usin' none of it yourself. I'll need it bad in the mornin'. I'll be out in the mornin'. They just picked me up. I ain't done nothin'."

When the turnkey returned the man was again lolling with his back in Jack's direction.

"Come on, you!" the turnkey said, and he piloted the man down the corridor.

The door of another cell was shut on him and the turnkey came back. He did not look at Jack. The big door was once more opened and shut. Jack cautiously opened the envelope and looked inside. Little powders lay there, and he knew that in each was cocain.

For an instant there was a convulsive movement of the former crook's lips — a kind of licking movement expressive of intense longing

"No," he whispered to himself. "I won't do it."

He closed the envelope and thrust it into the pocket of his coat.

Then came minutes of intense desire as visions of the past swept him—visions that were like elated dreams through which he moved in a delirium of happiness. He had used the drug for five years. He knew just what it would do for him. If he used just enough of it, this bare cot, this hard floor, these bars would pass away, and his spirit would soar unbound. He could be happy—very happy—for hours. Let them do what they liked after that.

He started up to find he had been sitting with closed eyes. He felt almost as if he had been taking the drug. He thought of Peterson—of how Peterson had laid balm on a soul more tired than wicked, more misled than inherently lost.

His eyes brightened and he laughed silently.

"Gee, if this ain't somehow part of the frame-up I'll eat it all!" he said to himself. "They thought they'd put something on me some way. But I'll fool 'em! What a game it is! Why do they want to land me so hard? Is it—is it—well, it ain't anything human. It's a kind of a machine that don't overlook nothin'."

He made a tiny slit in the lining of his vest and pushed the powders one by one far down between the lining and the outer fabric. Then he crumpled the envelope and threw it on the floor near the door.

He began to nod. Slowly his head went to his breast. He seemed to sleep deeply, motionlessly.

The big door was again opened. A man came softly down the corridor. He passed the door of Jack's cell with a glance into its interior. What he saw dispelled his caution. He walked to the cell door and peered inside. Then he retraced his steps.

He went to the chief's office.

"He's dead to the world," he said. "Daykin is some actor, I guess. Jack fell for it dead easy. He'll be half bugs in the morning!"

"Well, that's all right," the chief said. "But that's the last time you pull that stunt in this jail. What do you think I am? Think I'm goin' to stand for everything?"

The man laughed. He had his own opinion of what the chief was.

"You tell Quigley that, too," the chief said menacingly.

Next morning Peterson and the physician whom he had made the appointment with were early in the court-room. Jack's case was called in due time.

The official testimony against him was baldly and briefly given. It was to the effect that he had stolen a pocketbook, and that he was a former thief and a dope-fiend.

Peterson asked permission to have his physician examine Jack. The request was unusual. The permission was given only after much discussion of the law.

"Is this man a dope-fiend?" Peterson asked when the physician had finished.

"He is not," the physician answered. "He may have been in the past. There is some indication of that. But he is entirely free of the drug at this time."

Peterson demanded Jack's release, but Jack was bound over on the evidence. Peterson's cash bail was accepted. Jack walked out of the jail with Peterson.

They entered Peterson's machine. It pulled away from the station. Jack kept looking back with his quick-moving eyes.

"You better get me stowed away some place," he said after a moment. "Another machine with three men in it is following us."

## CHAPTER XI.

### VIOLENCE.

PETERSON looked back. A low-slung green car was nosing along after the lawyer's big machine. One man drove. Two others sat in the back seat. The car was moving easily, and Peterson saw that it was capable of great speed. His own car was built for comfort rather than speed, and he knew he could not run away from this car that hugged the pavement.

"Why do you think they are following us?" Peterson asked Jack.

"I seen the men standing in the doorway as we come out," Jack replied. "They give us the wunst-over. Then as soon as we got started they was after us."

"Who do you think they are?"

"I don' know. It's hard to tell. But I want to give you a tip that you got to keep your eyes open from now on. Whoever is running this thing has found out that I got some information for you. They ain't goin' to start no rough-house unless they have to, but they'll do it, and do it in a hurry when they do have to."

Peterson ran his car slowly, debating what to do. He had a first notion to appeal to a crossing policeman, but he quickly saw that would be ridiculous. He could only say, helplessly, that he was being followed. Called upon for proof, he would be unable to produce it. He urged his car forward a little. A backward glance showed him the other car had also accelerated its speed to keep at the same distance from his own as before.

He came to a street which intersected the one leading from the station. He turned into it without slowing down. He had gone but a hundred feet when another backward glance showed him the other car was still on his trail. He moved forward to the next corner, crossed over, turned abruptly, and came back.

Midway of the block the cars passed, one on each side of the street. Peterson had a good view of the occupants of the other car. The driver seemed an ordinary sort of person. In his goggles, his vizored cap, and his long coat, he appeared to be the customary chauffeur of a hired machine.

One of the men in the back seat was slender and dark, apparently a quick, nervous man, ready at all times for emergencies. The third man, Peterson quickly decided, was the most dangerous of the three. He had a square, rough face, and his body was thick and broad. He was a man whom the word "thug" most aptly described.

As the cars came opposite each other the heavy man leaned forward. The younger man thrust his arm across the other's chest and forced him back. Peterson quickly sensed the combination: a man of quick mind was guiding a man of brute strength.

Without fully realizing the situation Peterson saw that this was the sort of thing he was to be up against from now on. Some big brain was directing the conspiracy against Inez Braddon. This big brain was being aided by other brains of various caliber, and ready to be called into being was a ruthless force that would hesitate at no sort of violence, if brains should fail in the final test.

The lawyer shivered a little. He was beginning to understand what had only been feeling with Jack. He perceived, with the former crook, that no detail was escaping his opponents. They appeared to have a baffling power of anticipating everything that Peterson set out to do.

Peterson came to the next crossing while he thought this much out. He turned the corner abruptly with an apologetic glance at the policeman who stood in the middle

of the street. Then he opened up and his big car bounded forward.

"See if they turn that corner after us," he directed Jack.

"There they come!" Jack reported after a moment. "And they're comin' fast! Now they're slowin' down!"

"They're about the same distance behind us as they were, eh?" Peterson asked.

"Just the same."

"I'm going to stop at my office," Peterson said. "Get ready to jump out quickly. Run into the building. I'll follow you in a minute."

"I'll jump when you do," Jack said. "I don' know if they're after you or me, or both of us."

"You do what I tell you to do," Peterson said roughly.

He brought the car to an abrupt stop. Jack jumped out, with a sullen look on his face. Peterson stepped down leisurely. The green car passed. None of the men in it looked in the lawyer's direction.

Peterson entered the office building. Jack was waiting inside the door. They ascended to Peterson's office. Peterson ushered Jack inside and closed the door.

"Tell me what happened to you?" Peterson said.

Jack detailed briefly his experience in the jail.

"You used dope at one time?" Peterson asked.

"I did when I was crooked," Jack said. "Most of the kind I was use some dope."

"But you're not going back to it?"

"If I had been goin' back to it I'd have gone back last night," Jack said. "No; I ain't goin' back to it. Say, I'll tell you about me. I never had a chance. I know that's a bum excuse, but it's straight a good many times. Many's the night I've laid under cover, hidin' from the cops, even when I hadn't done nothin' an' wished I could be straight.

"But they never would let me.

"I had a honest job several times, but they run me out of it. I've been peaceful since I been workin' for you. I thought you could keep 'em from ridin' me, but they begun again since you got this thing o' yours started.

"But it ain't me myself that they're after now. They're after you. I've seen frame-ups before, not big ones like this, but frame-ups, just the same, and they all work out alike. You want to quit or get ready to do some fightin'."

"I'll fight," said Peterson. "They haven't got me scared. And I want you to stick to me. I don't seem to be able to get any one else."

"Maybe I c'n do you some good," Jack said. "Maybe what I learned when I was doin' jobs myself will help you. Anyways you c'n count on me to do what I can. You'll never find me losin' my nerve, anyhow. Nobody could ever say I lost my nerve."

"Good enough," Peterson said. "But you'll have to keep under cover, won't you?"

"I won't get under cover just to run away," Jack returned. "I ain't in any more danger than you are."

"I think you are," Peterson said. "They are fighting me with brains now. I believe they are after you in the other way."

"If I had some clothes I could rig myself so they'd never know me," Jack said.

"You sit over there till I clear up a little business, and we will see what we can do," Peterson said. "Maybe those fellows will tire of waiting for us."

"They won't get tired," Jack said.

At the end of two hours Peterson turned to the former crook again.

"Well, what would you suggest?" he said.

"Is there a back way out of this buildin'?" Jack asked.

"Yes."

"Gimme me enough money to buy an outfit and I'll come in the front way after a while and you won't know me yourself."

Peterson drew a generous bill from his pocket and handed it to the man. Jack left.

The former crook did not trust the elevator. He went down the stairs softly, his eyes darting from side to side and his eager ears pricked to listen. He gained the rear entrance without having met any one. He stepped into a kind of court running to the main street. He walked rapidly down it.

As Jack turned into the street a man emerged from a doorway near the exit of the office building and ran swiftly down the court. When he got to the street he could just make out Jack a short distance ahead of him in the noonday crowd.

The man dodged through the crowd. In a moment he was at the crook's back. Jack presently turned into a store. The other man followed him.

In the course of an hour Jack was back in Peterson's office. He had returned by the route he had gone. He sat opposite the lawyer, and Peterson looked at him admiringly. Jack was dressed in a dark, close-fitting suit. For so little a man his shoulders bulked surprisingly. On his head was a soft hat of inconspicuous design and tameness of color. From beneath the hat rather long brown hair flowed. His face and hands had a butternut tan.

"You're a pretty good-looker when you get fixed up, Jack," Peterson said.

"Would you know me?" Jack asked anxiously.

"I don't think so," Peterson answered. "Still I can't tell. I've studied you pretty closely in times past, you know. I'm sure those men in the car wouldn't know you."

"That's what I want to try," Jack said.

"Very well," Peterson said.

They went down to Peterson's car. The green car was not in sight. Peterson started slowly down the street. Jack watched for a sign of the green car, but there was none.

"Keep right on," he said. "Give 'em all the chance they want."

They left the business part of the city behind after a while and came to the residence section. As they neared a cross street there was the sound of an automobile horn.

The green car came around the corner and crossed in front of them, turned in the direction opposite to that in which they were going. As the two machines came abreast, Peterson saw the young man shoot a glance at Jack. Then he laid his hand on the other man's arm and spoke. The big man looked up and answered the other.

Then the green car passed on and kept going till it came to the next cross street. It disappeared down this.

"They didn't recognize you," Peterson exulted

"An' it's me they're after," Jack said grimly.

"We'd better go out to my house and leave you there," Peterson said. "You can stay in the house and communicate with me by phone. To-night we will go over the situation and figure out just what you are to do."

Jack nodded.

Peterson sent the big car forward. They raced for half a dozen blocks, and the houses began to thin out. Soon there were fields on each side of them. And then there was a sound behind them which made them both look around. The green car, coming like mad, was not a hundred rods away.

"They're after us," Jack said. "You got a gun?"

Peterson shook his head.

"Not here," he said. "Half a dozen of them at the house."

Jack pulled a brand new automatic from his pocket and held it clasped loosely in his hand.

They sped on. The green car was just behind them. Its front wheels were opposite their rear ones. They were abreast. In the hand of the big man something glimmered in the sun.

"Duck!" Jack screamed.

"Stop!" the big man yelled.

"Stop!" Jack ordered Peterson. "Do it quick!"

Peterson slowed down, prepared to stop. The green car shot by. As it did so, Jack rose in his seat. He took quick, sure aim and fired. Peterson saw the green car waver, as if it had been the thing hit. It swayed from right to left and back again, and then it suddenly darted for the side of the road, as if it sought cover.

Peterson heard the crash of the car as it brought up against a giant oak-tree. The impact was so great that the car was hurled back. Still it seemed to writhe, as if it lived. Peterson thought it was going over, but it remained upright and settled down.

"Beat it!" Jack said. "Straight ahead. Crouch as we go by."

Peterson did as he was bidden. Subconsciously he admired the way the former

crook's mind was working. Jack had not had a moment of hesitation since the order to stop had been given by the big man in the green car.

As they shot past the car, Peterson expected to hear a shot, but there was none Looking back, he saw the big man stand up uncertainly and begin to yell to the driver. The other man got to his feet, but the driver did not. Peterson could see him lying back limply in his seat.

"I got that driver through the arm," Jack said.

"A good shot," Peterson said. "You're sure it was his arm?"

"Sure," Jack said.

"I was afraid you had killed him!" said Peterson. "This is bad business!"

"It 'll be worse than that before you're through with it," Jack said. "Say, them feltahs recognized me."

"That's right," Peterson said. "What'll we do now?"

"Keep on goin'."

They came to Peterson's house.

"You better stop here for a minute an' get another car," Jack said. "They may be lookin' for us."

"I don't think they'll be looking for anybody for a while," Peterson laughed. "They were pretty well smashed up."

"Not them," said Jack, "but some of the rest of them."

Peterson glanced quickly at his companion's scowling face. Jack met the glance with a touch of defiance

"Oh, you c'n look!" he said. "You'll find out how many of them there is before you're done, or I miss my guess."

Peterson got another car, and they ran out to the road.

"Keep on goin' the way we was," Jack said.

They ran for two miles into the country.

"Put me down here," Jack said.

"What are you going to do?" Peterson asked

"You'll hear from me."

"Look here," said Peterson sharply. "What are you up to? Remember, that I'm the boss in this thing! When will I hear from you precisely."

"What time is it now?"

"Half past two."

"You'll hear from me at five o'clock," Jack said. "You better stop at the house and get a gun on your way back."

"I'll do that," Peterson said.

"You got any money on you?"

"Plenty. How much will you need?"

"A coupla hundred."

There was a touch of defiance in the former crook's tone

"What are you going to do with all that?"

"I don' know. I may need it. I don' know what's going to turn up."

Peterson handed over the money and turned the car about. When he looked back at a bend in the road Jack was still standing there, watching the car disappear from his view.

"It's a curious business," Peterson said to himself. "It's strange I can't get help except from a man whom I picked out of the gutter!"

He returned to his office. As he hung up his hat his telephone-bell rang. He answered, thinking it might be Jack at the other end of the wire.

"This Peterson?"

The voice was not Jack's. Peterson could not identify it.

"Yes," he answered.

"You travel with some rather rough people, don't you? Gunmen, eh? Well, I just want to warn you to lay off that stuff! We don't want to harm you, but you mustn't be bull-headed' Get me?"

"Who are you?"

There was a tantalizing laugh, and the circuit clicked shut in Peterson's ear. He jiggled his receiver up and down and kept saying, "Hello!"

The soft voice of the operator greeted him.

"Who called me just now?" he demanded.

There was a pause.

"We don't know who called you," the soft voice said.

Peterson hung up his receiver and leaned back in his chair. He was perplexed, amazed, and baffled. What force was he working against? That was the question he wanted an answer to. A man cannot

work in the dark against odds, no matter how clever he may be.

There was an ignorant young woman, an old fogy of a lawyer, a showman. These were the characters that had appeared in the light. And behind them, yet to appear, were—whom or what?

He began looking at his watch at four o'clock. The minute-hand made the circuit. It passed twelve again. It was ten minutes past five, fifteen minutes past five, half past—and Jack had not called him.

He took down his receiver, and with some asperity spoke the number of his house.

A servant answered him presently. He ordered the man to go to the garage to see if Jack was there. The man, returning, said Jack was not. He had not seen Jack since he had left with Mr. Peterson.

Peterson jammed the receiver back on the hook. He waited till six o'clock and then gave up.

"I guess Jack has quit me, too," he said. "Damn him, I'm afraid he was stringing me all along! I suppose he'll divide that two hundred with the gentlemen in the green car. He had me seeing things almost. I'm going to rip open the heart of this thing now. I'm tired trifling!"

## CHAPTER XII.

### A SHOT IN THE NIGHT.

PETERSON and Inez sat in the parlor of her boarding house that evening. Peterson had come to talk to the girl about taking her case into court.

"There is some sort of game going on that I can't fathom," he said. "We will start a proceeding tending to establish you as Inez Braddon, heiress under the Quayle will.

"It will mean notoriety in the newspapers, and all that sort of thing, but it will bring us, in a way, under the protection of the law. This chicanery will have to stop then. Whatever these people do will have to be done legally. They will have to file a counter-suit, and to prove anything they will have to bring their people into court. Then we shall know where we are. We won't be fighting in the dark!"

As he talked Peterson had been sitting with his back to an open window. It was the first really hot night of the season. There was not enough air stirring to cause the single gaslight above their heads to flicker.

And outside that window, in the darkness, a man crouched.

Inez lifted her head resolutely.

"If that is what you think best, go ahead," she said. "I shall despise the notoriety, but I can endure it."

"Very good," said Peterson. "Now, I don't want to frighten you, but I want to tell you of a little experience I had this afternoon. It will show you how necessary it is that you be on your guard against strangers."

He related his encounter with the men in the little green car.

"You might have been killed!" the girl said with wide eyes.

"But I wasn't," Peterson smiled, his eyes on her face.

"And you think the man you befriended has deserted you?"

"I'm afraid so. If he hasn't, why hasn't he phoned me? You see, his stories were wildly improbable. He almost had me scared."

The girl sat with her hands folded in her lap. She was looking straight at him.

"Mr. Peterson," she said at last in a low voice, "I don't want any harm to come to you because of me. If you think you are in danger, hadn't you better withdraw now?"

"Quit because I run a little personal risk?" he asked.

"Well, there are many other cases you could busy yourself with—"

"But I'm busy with this one just now. No, I don't quit!"

A slow flush came up under the girl's clear eyes. Angus Peterson saw it, and instantly he reproached himself. Inez was young, and her knowledge of the world was limited, he told himself. It wasn't fair to her for him to pose as a hero in her presence. He was nothing more than her lawyer—could never be anything more.

He was a good deal of a boor, he felt, for rousing her emotions in that way. And

that flush, still lingering there under her eyes, was beautiful to look at! With an involuntary sigh Peterson rose.

"That's what we'll do, then," he said. "We'll just show these rascals that we're not to be trifled with. And that, I am sure, will be the end of it all. Well, I must be going."

He turned toward the door. Inez took a step toward him.

The man crouched outside the window rose. He thrust the muzzle of his revolver through the rusted screen.

Neither Peterson nor the girl heard the slight sound.

Then there was a shot.

**(To Be Continued NEXT WEEK.)**

# CASEY JONES.

BY T. LAWRENCE SEIBERT.

*(Copyrighted, 1909, by Newton and Seibert, Los Angeles, California.)*

(In response to numerous requests, we are reprinting the most famous of all railroad songs.—EDITOR.)

COME all you rounders if you want to hear
A story about a brave engineer.
Casey Jones was the rounder's name,
On a six, eight-wheeler, boys, he won his fame.
The caller called Casey at half past four—
Kissed his wife at the station door.
Mounted to the cabin with his orders in his hand,
And he took his farewell trip to that promised land

CHORUS

Casey Jones mounted to the cabin,
Casey Jones with his orders in his hand;
Casey Jones mounted to the cabin,
And he took his farewell trip to that promised land

Put in your water and shovel in your coal,
Put your head out the window, watch them drivers roll
"I'll run her till she leaves the rail,
'Cause I'm eight hours late with that Western mail."
He looked at his watch, and his watch was slow;
He looked at the water, and the water was low.
He turned to the fireman, and he said
"We're going to reach Frisco, but we'll all be dead"

CHORUS

Casey Jones going to reach Frisco,
Casey Jones, but we'll all be dead.
Casey Jones going to reach Frisco;
We're going to reach Frisco, but we'll all be dead

Casey pulled up that Reno hill,
He tooted for the crossing with an awful shrill,
The switchman knew by the engine's moans,
That the man at the throttle was Casey Jones.
He pulled up within two miles of the place,
Number Four staring him right in the face.
He turned to the fireman, said, "Boy, you'd better jump,
'Cause there's two locomotives that's a going to bump"

CHORUS

Casey Jones, two locomotives;
Casey Jones, that's a going to bump.
Casey Jones, two locomotives;
There's two locomotives that's a going to bump

Casey Jones said, just before he died
"There's two more roads that I'd like to ride."
Fireman said, "What could that be?"
"The Southern Pacific and the Santa Fe"
Mrs. Jones sat on her bed a sighing—
Just received a message that Casey was dying.
Said, "Go to bed, children, and hush your crying,
"'Cause you got another papa on the Salt Lake Line"

CHORUS

Casey Jones! Got another papa,
Mrs. Casey Jones, on that Salt Lake Line.
Mrs. Casey Jones, got another papa,
And you've got another papa on that Salt Lake Line

# AUSTIN IRBY—OPERATOR.—No. 4.

## The Wild, Wild Ham.

BY WILL MACMAHON.

"SINE!"

"*YOU* sine!"

"Ham!"

"*You* ham!"

Those are fighting words among a hundred thousand American telegraph operators—the Battle Cry of Keydom, as it were. Railroad, commercial message, broker, press, and wireless men see red when the personal insult of four-dots, dot-dash, and dash-dash ("Ham!") is flashed to them, and there have been instances where aggrieved operators traveled long distances to use their fists in reprisal for this enraging electrical attack.

Austin Irby, aged fifteen, was the youngest telegrapher on the Pittsburgh-West Division of a Trans-Continental link railway, but a circuit fighter of great savageness. Away from his office and among non-operators, he appeared a modest, gentle youth and gave the impression that telegraphy was a calm and philosophical pursuit if not, indeed, refining and ennobling.

But when he returned to the environment of key, relay, and sounder, Operator Irby reverted to type and became a wild, wild ham of the most virulent character. At the slightest provocation he would talk shop on the wire in the weird abbreviations of his older and untamed brothers: he played their crafty tricks with open key, and he made shameful second copies.

If the Morse symbols were lightning bolts, Austin would have died a thousand deaths at the hands of distant, sober-minded experts, righteous in their wrath.

With the comforting knowledge that he was the railroad's child operator, he did more than his share of maddening listeners along the line, waiting with pressing business of their own to send, by secretly opening the circuit for long minutes when a fast sender harried him. Then the boy, after closing the key for a moment, would assert, brazenly:

"It wasn't open here! G a (Go ahead) and get a move on u!"

To rewrite a telegraphic message that one has been compelled to scribble illegibly is an ignominy equaled only by that of a cook who scorches the omelet and is obliged to break more eggs. Young Irby threw into the waste-paper basket many, many message shells.

And if any one infringed by even one dot on what he considered his inalienable rights as a telegrapher regularly on the pay-roll, he staged a striking imitation of a wildcat putting full emphasis on the first part of its name.

Austin should have had perfect telegraph manners from the outset because his teacher, counselor and champion was none other than Vic Ryan, the fastest sender and the best receiver on the road if not, in truth, in all railway America.

Mr. Ryan was a train despatcher's copier in "DI," the terminal office, and various operators out on the line found sundry excuses for writing letters to him in the hope that he would answer and they should come into possession of a specimen of his script. He made with an ordinary pen, swiftly but unhurriedly, characters that appeared as if etched on copper.

The copier's admirers also went to the length of asking "DI" office pretended questions on the wire; had they or had they not reported the passing of such and such an extra freight? Vic Ryan would give them the time figures from the train-sheet with an explosive speed that delighted excruciatingly these true lovers of the audi-

tory science invented by Professor Samuel Finley Breese Morse.

During his apprenticeship to the art of telegraphy, Austin Irby had been the office-boy in DI office and he imitated his instructor in nearly everything but the growing of a mustache. He patterned his writing after Mr. Ryan's free-hand, copper-plate script, and tried to send rhythmically on the wire like him, meanwhile reflectively feeling an upper lip against the future.

After a half year's tuition, the copier managed to place his student as day operator at the terminal freight office where there was no telegraphing that concerned the actual running of trains. Thus, Vic Ryan lost immediate wire touch with Austin, but he heard disturbing rumors about him.

"Austie is a nice kid," the copier remarked to the despatcher, "but he's making a pest of himself as a wire-scrapper. The boys along the line do not know that he's an orphan and that his dad was a Pittsburgh-West engineer and died at the throttle like a good, game man.

"They are going after him tooth and toe-nail. He fought circuit fifteen minutes the other day with a message that could just as well have come by railway mail-service. By the time he grows out of knickerbockers into long trousers and gets a job on the train wire, I'm afraid he'll be ready to lock horns with you!"

"Only once!" the lordly train-runner said, calmly. "I'll ground him out, east and west, and patch the wire around him. Then I'll send a relief operator to throw the brat out of the tower window. I don't care if he alights on his head and shatters a rail to bits!"

"He isn't a bonehead!" Vic retorted, sharply. "The boy's young, that's all. He'll outgrow his foolishness mighty quick when he gets a real job. That freight office is enough to make anybody wild."

Operator Irby meanwhile—thanks to a lazy, shirking agent—devoted his spare moments from the key to doing janitor, porter, and freight-handler stunts. Six months of wielding the broom and the mop and juggling boxes and barrels on and off of a man's size hand-truck made the boy almost as muscular as a wrestler.

A few years more of it might have sent him out on the vaudeville stage as a professional strong man, but Fate and Granny Mowrey intervened. She was young Irby's foster-mother, and his highly important fifteenth birthday had arrived.

"Sure, yer goin' on sixteen now," she announced, regretfully, "an' long trousies ye shall have, me bhoy. Perhaps, th' division opeerayter will be givin' ye a rale job along th' main-line, now, though it fair breaks me heart to see ye dressin' like a mon an' going' out into th' wide worrul.

"Oi suppose ye'll be soon forgettin' th' cranky ould woman an' little Agnes Helene, what wid new faces an' th' disseepations av strange boardin'-houses, oi dunno?"

Agnes Helene Mowrey was Granny's eleven-year-old granddaughter, an orphan, and Austin's make-believe sister.

"Aw, no I won't: you know I won't!" he protested, warmly. "I'm going to look out for Agnes until she gets through college, and I'm always going to take care of you, Granny, you bet!"

"Listen to him, will ye!" the little old lady exclaimed as if there were other hearers present. "He w'u'd have us think he's niver goin' to be married, at all, at all."

"Well, what of that; who wants to marry?" the boy demanded. "Vic Ryan never married—and he has only himself to support."

"How ould is Misther Ryan, do ye know?"

"Why, he's—let me see—he's every bit of twenty-two!"

"Th' poor, decrepit, dodderin' creature!" Granny Mowrey remarked, whimsically. "No sinsible woman w'u'd have th' ancient loikes av him for a hoosband. Small wondher Miss Cla-a-rke give him th' mitten!"

The boy winced and gave his white-haired foster-mother a piercing, suspicious look.

"Uh-huh!" he agreed, hesitatingly.

Austin knew she had no reason to believe Vic Ryan was an unsuccessful suitor for the hand of Ruby Luella Clarke, the only woman telegrapher on the division, who had married a mere engineer. Operator Irby, himself, had been the victim of that queer

sentiment called Puppy Love and, because Ruby Luella was too precipitate to wait five or six years for a telegraph operator to grow up, he would remain a bachelor until he was as old as Methuselah or Copier Ryan.

The long trousers promoted Austin to a position among the elect of the road, those prideful ones who have to do with the actual movement of traffic. His post of duty was in "JY" tower, somewhere along the Ohio River, within commuting distance of a large city noted for its smoky atmosphere—as a war correspondent would say with painful attention to the military necessity of not naming places.

As Granny Mowrey's tenement home was in the aforesaid place, her forster-son rode in accommodation trains to and from his work—and thereby escaped the snares, prunes, pitfalls, fried liver, lures, hash, and enchantments of the boarding-house life.

He was the night operator, and any one whose duties begin at or near the setting of the sun is head and shoulders above the person who does similar work in the daytime—as any night man is quick to acknowledge.

The responsibilities of the position did not oppress Austin; they delighted him. He drank in every dot from the train wire and devoured the book of rules and the schedule. He pulled the semaphore from red to white with a mighty sense of power to permit real passenger-trains to dash past.

But there were no telegrams to send at night from this isolated tower and his fingers itched to break in on the message wire. He had made some fine enemies on that circuit in the day time, but these night owls did not even know that he was alive.

Then, one lucky evening, the day man casually pointed to a message left over on the desk and went away, without the ghost of a smile. Operator Irby seized the telegram, and for once did not stop to wonder what pursuit a daylight worker follows from sunset to dawn that makes him more of a fat-head than any night man possibly could be. The words on the official blank, apparently written by the section foreman, demanded attention from the highest officer in the Maintenance of Way Department.

Austin fairly leaped to the telegraph-table to call DI on the message wire, but at that same moment some other impatient operator took the circuit and said:

"DI, DI—"

Young Mr. Irby brazenly interrupted him and flashed:

"DI, DI, DI—"

The stranger elbowed aside his antagonist and snapped:

"DI, DI, DI, DI—"

"Get out!" the boy rattled off, angrily. "DI "

Again the interloper choked him off, succeeded in making:

"Scat! DI, DI—"

And then they went at it hammer and tongs.

"Ham'"

"U ham!"

"Sine'"

"U sine!"

Finally, the other excited contestant announced, belligerently:

"I'm 'VR'! Who are u?"

Austin did not know that "VR" was the call of a new office on the line. He assumed that it was the personal signal of the fellow, an obscure message man if not a newcomer.

"None of your biz who I am, u big fat-head!" he replied, and made up his mind to fight for the circuit against this unreasonable ham as long as life lasted and reason held its throne. "And if we ever meet, I'll knock u cold'"

Quite unconsciously, he closed his pretty little speech with a snappy "JY" and thereby betrayed the whereabouts of his tower to the enemy.

Then the boy began to open the key every time the stranger did, to shut off any profane or insulting rejoinder. As he touched and retouched the disk with his finger tips the conviction grew upon him that, as an ever ready wire-scrapper, he ought also to be accomplished in the manly art of self defense with all its technique of his and get away.

He determined to go in for the most rigorous athletic routine, say fifteen minutes with the one-pound dumbbells and bending forward to touch his toes twenty-five times in each twenty-four hours.

Some fine day he should meet this imbecile circuit contender, say to him coldly: "I am the man from JY that you offended!" and instantly swing a mighty right to the scoundrel's unprotected left jaw. Austin always wished his enemies to fall "with a dull and sickening thud"—a newspaper phrase that he much admired for the picture it made in his mind.

Even as he sat there, mischievously opening and closing the circuit, he composed a private telegraph code for the theatrical catastrophe — D S T, "dull sickening thud'".

Thus, five thoroughly enjoyable minutes passed, and Operator Irby was pondering on the possibility of attaching the pendulum of the office clock to the key to make a mechanical, monotonous, infuriating interruption for wire fighting purposes, when a tall, broad-shouldered, wild-eyed young man darted up the tower stairs and into the office.

He was breathing deeply and his fists were clenched and held prominently to the fore.

"Oh, you will, eh, will you?" he roared, advancing toward the startled lad.

Austin saw that he had to deal with a maniac and, to calm and reassure the unfortunate creature, swiftly placed the stove between them—by the simple expedient of leaping behind it

"Will do what, sir?" he inquired, gently.

"Knock me cold!" the stranger shouted.

That sounded like a familiar quotation, and a light suddenly dawned on the boy.

"Say, how far away is VR office?" he demanded, with an injured air.

"Three quarters of a mile, at the new connecting bridge," the caller growled, "and I ran all the way here to give you a good beating!"

"Well, you've had all your trouble for nothing!" Austin informed him, with an engaging grin. "I'm not fighting six footers to-night. You see, it wouldn't be right This is the anniversary of the day I knocked one cold 'with a dull and sickening thud' and he left a widow and a whole lot of small children

"No, sir! I'm not in the mood for murder to-night. What's your personal sign?"

"'WY' for Whitney," the young man answered, unclenching his cobble-stone fists and beginning to smile. "What's yours?"

"'IY' for Irby; shake!" the boy replied, and thus were foes made friends.

"Glad to meet you, 'IY'; that little wire scrap doesn't count!"

"Same here, 'WY'; I've forgotten all about it! But, say, I wonder who was fighting me after you stopped?"

Operator Irby hurried to close the key and over the wire came, savagely:

"I, (Aye!) I, I, 'DI'!"

"Who at 'DI'?" he inquired, cautiously.

The letter "V" was hurtled back.

That was the personal signal of Austin's own teacher of the Morse alphabet—Vic Ryan—and his face burned with shame for having acted the goat in such company.

"Why, that's the despatcher's copier!" Friend Whitney exclaimed. "Guess he's been trying to answer us both, and making a three-cornered fight of it! So-long, old man, see you later," and he dashed down the stairs to run all the way back to "VR" office.

"WY" was a splendid athlete and the day never would come when Friend Irby could knock him cold, D S T or otherwise.

Then the humiliated boy sent the section foreman's communication to "DI," never questioning the strange circumstance that the train-wire man happened to be on the message circuit at that particular time. The telegram read:

> Unable find exhaust lost from compound cylinder of limited mail's engine. Section hands worn out by search. Suggest try other departments for volunteers.

Not more than five minutes later an answer came. It was addressed to "Night Operator, 'JY' Tower," and said:

> Take lantern, inspect road-bed closely for missing object. Best hour for phosphorescence is midnight. Search both tracks from "JY" to mile post west Honor of road at stake. We rely on you

It was signed by the division operator, the trainmaster and the superintendent. Evidently, they had been in conference when the baffled Maintenance of Way Department message went in.

Operator " IY " glowed with pride and loyalty as he read and reread that stirring appeal. He would go over the road-bed as if with a fine-toothed comb, and find that mislaid exhaust by sense of touch if not of sight.

He had broken twice on the impressive word " phosphorescence " and Copier " V " obligingly explained that it meant a white, shining appearance.

It was twilight then and Austin would have made a preliminary inspection of the right-of-way but for the several evening trains that compelled him to man his tower. And when night fell it was as black as pitch and a March gale was blowing.

His office clock fairly raced on to a wailing, spooky midnight. Then he nervously lighted the lantern, swallowed hard to down something that seemed to be beating wildly in his throat, and faced the utter darkness outside.

Surely, if good-natured Vic Ryan could have foreseen the terrors that quickly claimed his former student he would not have sent him on that wild-goose chase to locate an engine's alleged lost exhaust—a spray of steam from the compound cylinder.

The deep, wide river was to the boy's left as he started west, and the high, wooded hills to his right. In the daytime there were fish in the Ohio and squirrels in the forest, but now his world unexpectedly was peopled with monsters.

Out of the unseen water, at any moment, might crawl huge, slimy shapes; down from the black hills great, horned or fanged beasts could make a silent rush.

But, hearkening in dread to the wind in the trees and glancing fearfully everywhere outside the glaring, dancing circle of the lantern, he forced his reluctant feet to carry on. He safely reached the mile post without discovering anything that could be described as having a " white, shining appearance " in the night.

Then—and now Austin Irby, aged fifteen, temporarily must be labeled a hero—he decided to proceed another quarter mile to a country school-house and a church that stood close to the railroad. These at least were man-made things amid chaos—and that precious exhaust might have been lost further west than the limited mail's careless engineer supposed!

The boy found nothing phosphorescent on the road-bed in that quarter mile, but when opposite the little church he saw a number of things that nearly were of that nature. They were the head-stones of graves and their polished surfaces faintly reflected the light of the swinging lantern as if dull eyes had opened wide in the darkness—and hurriedly closed to hide their calculating watchfulness.

Austin was not a bigoted believer in ghosts, but there really was no reason for dallying in the neighborhood of an isolated graveyard now that he had completed his outward journey. He somewhat hurriedly turned to go back to the well-lighted telegraph room of " JY " tower, and then there came out of the west a dreadful, snorting sound.

He whirled about to face this peril and there, just far enough away to be indistinct, was an object of phosphorescence immense enough to satisfy the imagination of any young searcher. It wavered, it moved, it advanced.

Operator Irby's lantern fell from his nerveless fingers. He turned again toward " JY," he retreated, he fled. He ran, he leaped, he tried to annihilate distance.

He was a slender youth with long legs and pursuing him, he knew, was a shining something — a rogue sacred elephant, an evil-tempered white rhinoceros or a famished polar bear.

Before he had put one hundred yards behind him other dangerous beasts of his zoology readings joined the pursuer. There were a man-eating tiger, a truculent water buffalo, a savage lion and a desperate leopard, to say nothing of the fearless grizzly.

But one and all would have needed speed madness in an exaggerated form to overtake " IY " in the first quarter-mile. Thereafter, his breathing was labored, but he raced on, stumbled, fell, arose scratched and bruised, and ran again.

Not only was he menaced from the rear, but a cruel crocodile might intercept him from the river bank or a pitiless python drop out of the willows.

His lungs were tortured and his limbs

like lead when he reached the tower steps, half crawled into the office, locked the door and fell exhausted. He confidently expected the structure to reel at any moment from the onslaught of some gigantic creature that would tear him to pieces of a size best suited to its throat.

Fortunately for the boy's sanity, the message wire sounder began at that moment to click merrily with his call

"'JY, JY, JY!'" it said and added, "'VR!'" Friend Whitney was calling him

He went to the desk on hands and knees, reached up his shaking right fist and answered: "I!" The shining thing, or the wind, was howling with redoubled violence around the eaves and invisible talons or claws were testing the frail strength of the window-panes.

"I'll bet you were asleep!" "WY" remarked. "There was a message on the train wire for all engine-crews to watch out for a white horse astray on the track somewhere west of 'JY.' I O. K.'d for you so the despatcher wouldn't call you down."

"IY" jumped up, once more a confident, alert young telegrapher. A stray white horse, eh? He might have ridden back to the office instead of imitating a frightened jack rabbit

"Thanks, old man!" he told "WY" "I'll return the favor some night!"

Then Austin took stock of his damages and injuries. The excellent new long trousers were grimy and torn. His chin and one cheek were scratched; both his palms were punctured by cinders; his knees and elbows were bruised, and he was wet with perspiration

His lips felt curiously parched, puckered, and tired. He now recalled that, on the courageous outward journey, he had whistled the full repertory of his tunes, sacred, secular, and profane. The tempo of his return trip had been too fast for an accompaniment.

Operator Irby refreshed himself from the water bucket, and then conscience demanded a quenching. His examination of the road-bed after hearing the snorting sound had been perfunctory, not to say cursory.

This was not the way to discharge a sacred trust to the Pittsburgh-West Division in an emergency that had worsted the entire section force. So he hastened to send the following message to his superiors, and fraternally hoped to himself that it would ease their restless tossing on sleepless couches because of the lost exhaust:

"Painstaking search unsuccessful tonight. Will reexamine road-bed at dawn. Would appreciate fuller description of missing object."

He signed the telegram: "'IY,' Night Operator, 'JY' Tower." If he found the mislaid article, apparatus or paraphernalia his fortune was made on the road.

He undoubtedly would be a full-fledged train despatcher by the time he was Vic Ryan's age, and not a slavish copier who has to descend at times to taking a mere telegram from the message wire.

By now the boy heard a friendly neighing outside. It had taken that long for the pursuer to overtake the pursued, but, of course, the animal only walked, trotted or galloped and "IY" used high-velocity, low-trajectory, and ricocheting to reach the tower

He shaded the office-lamp to throw its rays out the window, and there squarely on the track stood an old white nag.

His halter strap dragged and he was not only lost but lonesome. Austin went out and cautiously led the docile beast off the right-of way

He was a city boy, but managed a makeshift knot to tether Pegasus to the tower stairs. The animal stepped on only part of the operator's left foot, but annoyed him exceedingly by nuzzling his right ear when "IY" thought he was a yard beyond reach of the huge, ungainly head.

Austin now sent another telegram, this time on the train wire itself.

"Captured runaway white horse unaided," he informed "DI," "and securely tied animal away from track. Any instructions?"

"Yes," the despatcher whizzed back. "Hit him on the head with an ax for me!"

Then an order buzzed over the wire to all engine-crews to resume full speed in the vicinity of "JY" tower.

"Now for the lost exhaust!" Operator Irby told himself, serenely, at the first graying of the dawn. Without the loss of a single finger he fed his captive a slice of bread withheld from a 1 A.M. basket luncheon.

Then he untied the halter, climbed aboard the brute's bony back and bullied him westward

The boy's progress was deliberate and he kept his gaze on the right hand track when not admiring the horse's straggling mane and large, sad ears. He was no phosphorescence, but found his lantern sitting upright and unbroken, but with the light out.

Circumstantial evidence would indicate that he had carefully placed the lamp deep between two ties before reluctantly making up his mind to leave that attractive spot.

He dismounted without disaster, thanks to the soft turf alongside the track, and looked about him. The grave stones in the little churchyard near by had abruptly changed their attitude with the coming of daylight.

They now wore an air of appeal, as if they longed for living eyes to approach and read their inscriptions, but Austin had had a vivid remembrance of the place's ghostly hostility in the preceding midnight.

He reascended his mount, with the important aid of the right-of-way fence, and rode back toward the tower. The signal-lamp dangled negligently from his arm and both heels thumped the old horse's skinny ribs.

He wore the air of a conqueror, with the exception of one startling stretch when the beast broke into a jolting trot. "IY" blamed his own inexperience in equestrianism and not the teeth rattling action of the noble steed for staging this pantomime of an evildoer riding on a rail

Strike Pegasus with an ax? Never! The boy thought more affectionately of that anonymous nag than does a riding master of his favorite high-school horse.

He had gone right out into the black, blustery night and, notwithstanding the striking forefeet and the gleaming teeth, made him a helpless prisoner by means of a granny-knot.

The day operator was standing at the foot of the tower steps when the night man casually approached on horseback.

"'Lost exhaust!'" "IY" remarked scornfully, confident that this live white horse was more momentous than any insensate phosphorescence.

The day man, as might be expected from one of his hours, wholly misinterpreted the remark

"I told Vic Ryan you weren't fool enough to go hunting for a lost exhaust—escaped steam from an engine's cylinder," he declared, defensively. "But he said he knew you better than I did!"

Austin, possessed in turn by surprise, chagrin and anger, partly slid and largely fell from his mount.

"The idea of any one trying to catch *me* on an old gag like that!" he exclaimed, too excitedly for the registering of scorn.

"Where'd you get the old crow bait?" the day operator demanded.

"He fell off the limited mail!" the boy answered—this sarcasm indicating that he was beginning to recover from the severe blow of that "lost exhaust."

At this juncture a farm-hand, who had come hurriedly down the track, arrived and claimed the white horse for his owner. He kicked the animal resoundingly in the ribs to set at rest any doubt as to their close acquaintance, and led him away.

Then the eastbound accommodation whistled for the station stop, and Operator Irby grabbed his lunch basket and sped away to catch the rear platform.

Safely aboard, a horrifying thought came to him. "DI" office was in possession of the damning message that he sent inquiring for a "fuller description" of the escaped steam! He writhed in the horror of this self-revelation of his verdancy, always an agonizing period for the extremely youthful

"Oh, oh!" he groaned. "All the time I was fighting for the circuit, Vic Ryan sat there waiting to put up the practical joke on me! I'll never scrap on the wire again as long as I live. No more kid tricks for me!

"Oh! I'll bet Miss Clarke thought I was a mere child. Oh, oh! No wonder

she married that engineer! Why, I won't even be allowed to vote for six long years yet.

"But I'm the head of a family, anyhow. I support Granny Mowrey and Agnes Helene just as well as if I was a hundred years old. I'm a man—and I'll act like one from now on."

Afar down the track the morning sunshine caught and emphasized a phosphorescent object. There was the noble Pegasus going forever out of Austin Irby's life at the heels of an ungentle and unthinking yokel.

"Good-by, old fellow!" he whispered, and his misty eyes proved that a man may be as tender-hearted as a child. "Never mind that kick in the ribs. Remember the slice of bread I gave you. It was home-made and there was butter and jam on it!

"You were as gentle as a lamb, but, gee, I'll bet you could go like the very wind if you took the notion! Good luck, old fellow!"

# THE OLD FLAGMAN ON THE FIRST FLAGWOMAN.

BY OLIN LYMAN.

(The first flagwoman has begun guarding railroad crossings. She is on duty for the New York Central, at Syracuse, New York.)

I SEE by the pa-apers,
A woman 'll stand,
A shoo in' the mob
Wid her signal in hand,
Phwile the ould shifter grunts
In surprise at her bossin';
Aw, the divil an' all
At a Syracuse crossin'!

'Tis "Go!" says the times:
The "Stop" sign is rusted:
The gait is too swift!
Sure, me throttle is busted!
There's sand in me gears;
Is it truth in me eye?
"A woman a flaggin' a crossin'!"
Aw my!

'Tis not to me taste!
Sure, they're iverywhere;
They're down on the ground
An' they're up in the air!
They're workin' for *wages*,
Like us that is wiser!
Aw, God bless our home
An' t' hell wid the Kaiser!

# OLD TIMES ON THE TEXAS AND PACIFIC.

## Once Part of the Gould Southwestern System, It Is Now a Prosperous Independent Property Serving the States of Louisiana and Texas.

## LOTS OF GOSSIP ABOUT THE OLD-TIMERS.

**Main Line Once a Branch—How Alex Smith Hired Himself and Made Good—"It's No Trouble to Answer Questions," a Motto That Made Road Popular—Despatcher Got Warm Reception When He Visited Boomer Ops.**

BY "J. E. M."

**Author of "Old Times on the Hannibal and St. Joe," "Some Poets of the Morse Shops," "Old Times on the El Paso Southwestern," "Old Times on the Billy Oh," etc.**

IN an article entitled "Old Times on the Gould Southwestern System," published in the May, 1916, issue of the RAILROAD MAN'S MAGAZINE, I mentioned, among other roads making up that system, the Texas and Pacific Railway. This road was, of course, one of the main arteries of that great system of thirty-five years ago, running southeast to northwest across the States of Louisiana and Texas.

Regardless of the fact that I mentioned the Texas and Pacific in connection with the story of the Gould Southwestern system as a whole, I think that the road itself is well worthy of an article all by its little old lonely.

### Marshall the Headquarters Town.

The general headquarters of the Texas and Pacific was, at the time of which I write—from twenty-eight to thirty-two years ago—located at Marshall, Texas. The road proper extended from Texarkana westward, by two routes, to Fort Worth.

One was called the Eastern Division, and ran by way of Marshall and Longview Junction, Mineola, and Dallas, and the other, called the Transcontinental Division, *via* Sherman to Fort Worth, where the two divisions came together again and the road continued westward through the wonderful cattle country of Callahan County to Baird, the county seat, and also a freight division. Thence it ran ever westward, to Big Spring, a passenger division point and headquarters of the Rio Grande Division.

From Big Spring the road ran to Toyah, which was a freight division, and then on again to Sierra Blanca, some sixty or seventy miles from El Paso. At Sierra Blanca the rails of the Texas and Pacific ended, and their trains used, and still use, the tracks of the Southern Pacific Lines from that point into El Paso, although their crews run straight through to El Paso, which is the western terminus of the road.

### Branch Became Main Line.

Another line of the Texas and Pacific runs from Marshall southeast to New Orleans, Louisiana. It was known as the New Orleans Pacific Division. This N. O. P. was built under a separate charter, and was

for a time known as the New Orleans Pacific Railroad.

While in the old days the main line was spoken of as running from Texarkana to El Paso, now, and for years, the main line is the road running direct from New Orleans across Louisiana and Texas to El Paso, while the line from Marshall to Texarkana is known as the Texarkana Branch. The Transcontinental Division still retains its old name, although for a time, some fifteen years ago, it was amalgamated with the Eastern Division, and its affairs conducted from Marshall; the train despatcher's office, however, being retained at Texarkana.

This arrangement did not last long, as it was found rather difficult to combine two divisions which ran through such different kinds of country, and the difficulties of divisional administration far exceeded the expense of maintaining two separate divisions with divisional officers.

In my article on the Gould Southwestern I mentioned that Mr. L. S. Thorne, or "Charlie" Thorne, as he was generally known, was the superintendent of the Eastern Division, with his headquarters at Marshall, and was promoted to be general manager when the general headquarters were removed from that point to Dallas. This was an error, which I take this opportunity to correct.

Captain John A. Grant was the general manager of the road since its construction, and upon the removal of the headquarters from Marshall to Dallas, continued in that position until his death, which occurred some years later—probably in 1900 or thereabouts. However, at the time of the removal the position of general superintendent was created, and Mr. Thorne promoted to fill it.

He retained the office until the death of Captain Grant, whom he succeeded as general manager. A few years later he was made vice-president, carrying the titles of vice-president and general manager, and performing the duties of both positions.

Upon his succession to the general managership the position of general superintendent was abolished and the position of assistant general manager created. Mr. John W. Everman filled it until the retirement of Mr. Thorne some years ago, when he resigned to accept service elsewhere.

### When "Charlie" Thorne was Super.

At the time of which I write—when Mr. Thorne was the superintendent of the Eastern Division—Mr. N. G. Pearsall was superintendent of the New Orleans Pacific Railroad, having jurisdiction over the entire line from Marshall to New Orleans. There were no trainmasters or assistant superintendents on the Texas and Pacific in those days, the officer next in authority to the division superintendent being the chief train-despatcher.

The gentleman who filled the latter position on the N. O. P. was Mr. T. W. Samuels, whose jurisdiction extended from Marshall, Texas, to Boyce, Louisiana. Mr. A. Wilson was the chief despatcher at New Orleans, having charge of the movement of trains over the road from that point to Boyce.

Under Mr. Samuels, as despatchers, were Mr. J. W. Sugrue, who has been a division superintendent of the Rock Island Lines for many years, and "Billy" Meeks, late manager of the Postal Telegraph Company at Atchison, Kansas. Mr. Samuels worked the first trick himself.

### Gossip About Old-Timers.

At New Orleans Mr. Wilson was assisted by Messrs. James W. Carpenter, Thomas E. Carroll, and "Tom" Mahoney. What became of Mr. Carpenter I don't know. When I last heard of Mr. Carroll he was a trainmaster on one of the divisions of the Mexican National Railways, while "Tom" Mahoney is now, or was a few months ago, superintendent of the "Tee Pee" at New Orleans, coming back to the old road after an absence of about thirty years, during which time he filled many positions of trust and responsibility.

I do not know of a more popular man in railroad service than this same Tom Mahoney. He is known wherever he has worked, by every one, from the track laborers up, as Tom, and any and all of them would fight for him at the drop of a hat, at any time and in any place, right or wrong.

On the Transcontinental Division at Texarkana Mr. Thomas W. Collins was superintendent. Mr. A. S. Ayres was the chief train despatcher, assisted by "Mannie" Nash, Tom Nash, his brother, and E. W. Cogswell. Mr. Collins left the T. and P. somewhere around 1887, and entered train service on the Cotton Belt Route, then the Texas and St. Louis.

I do not remember who succeeded him as superintendent, but Mr. Ayres remained as chief despatcher, although during the régime of the Gould Southwestern System he had been division superintendent, resigning to resume his position as chief despatcher when that system was dissolved. He remained in that position for many years, and it is only a comparatively short time ago—probably eight or ten years—that he consented to accept the superintendency.

I believe that he was constantly at one point—Texarkana—as telegraph operator, train despatcher, chief train despatcher, and superintendent for something like thirty-seven years; perhaps longer.

From the last "Tee Pee" gossip I heard, Mr. Mannie Nash was, I believe, chief despatcher under Mr. Ayres, while his brother Tom was located with the Missouri Pacific System as a division superintendent. Mannie Nash, too, is an old-timer in the service of the T. and P. at Texarkana, having started in in that office some thirty-five years ago as messenger and call-boy, learning telegraphy there, being promoted to telegraph operator, then to train despatcher, and then chief despatcher. He has never worked in any other office, or for any other railroad, which is quite a record in itself.

I don't know definitely what became of Cogswell, although I have heard rumors that he went to some road in Central America as trainmaster, and died there

At Marshall, as chief, after the dissolution of the Gould Southwestern, was Mr. T. C. Radey. I have already told of the trick despatchers — Woods, Coppage, Smith, Brown, McGovern, Clawson, Allender, Heisler, *et cetera*, but I have never told how the aforesaid Smith—A. J. Smith, or Alex, as he preferred to be called, came to be employed in our office. I say "our" office, for I was employed there at the time and believe myself well qualified to tell the story of how Alex came in our midst.

In the first place, he was a peculiar character—such a character as one does not meet every day. He was tall and commanding and dignified in appearance. Standing six feet three in his stockinged feet, he weighed about two hundred and seventy-five pounds on the hoof. He wore a long, flowing mustache and military-looking imperial, and had a voice that boomed good fellowship.

### Alex Smith, Master Bluffer.

One could hardly help but like him; and as for bluff—well, he had the gink that invented bluff hitched to a post and then some. Before coming to us at Marshall he had worked a trick for a short time—a very short time—at Palestine, on the International and Great Northern Railway. But he had not liked the way the road was managed, and told the superintendent of transportation, Mr. W. H. Boyd, as much. Then he found himself minus a job.

At this time Mr. Luther Johnson, who had been chief despatcher at Marshall, resigned to enter business for himself, and was succeeded by Mr. Radey, who had been promoted from the first trick on the West End. The vacancy thus created had not as yet been filled, the other two despatchers, Brown and Allender, "doubling up"—that is, each working twelve hours per day instead of eight until a man could be obtained for the job.

Alex, at Palestine, heard of the opening and wired Mr. Radey asking for it. Mr. Radey, however, had heard of Mr. Smith, and concluded that he did not require his services, valuable though they might be, so he wired him as follows—very curtly, it must be acknowledged:

A. J. S., Palestine
Can't use you. (Sig.) T. C. R.

The astonishing reply received within a half hour was.

O. K. I'll come at once

"Now what the dickens does that man

mean?" queried Mr. Radey when he was handed the message. "I told him that I couldn't use him, and here he says 'O. K. I'll come at once.' Now, wouldn't that jar your slats?"

I don't know about it jarring my slats, but it sure did amuse me when that evening, about eight o'clock, from the northbound "Cannon-Ball" stepped a gentleman wearing a silk hat and swinging a gold headed cane. He made his way directly to the office building and mounted the stairs to the despatcher's office.

### Couldn't Keep Him Out.

He did not come in through the door where the conductors entered to register, but came to the door marked "Private. No Admittance," and, pushing it open, went directly to Mr. Radey's desk, that gentleman having just returned from his late dinner. None of us had as yet seen Alex Smith, so we failed to recognize in this gorgeous stranger the earmarks of a train-despatcher, thinking him at least a director of the road.

"Smith's my name," said he in his booming voice to the astonished Mr. Radey. "A. J. Smith. Got your telegram. Took first train. Ready to sit in on third trick to-night. Don't need any posting. Know the whole road from El Paso to New Orleans and then back.

"Better have that first step on the stairs fixed. It's dangerous. Nearly took a tumble there. I'll see Thorne about it in the morning

"Going up to the Capitol Hotel now to get something to eat. Back in half-hour, Radey, then you can go home. I'll run things for you until twelve; then I'll relieve Allender there—by the way, I suppose that's Allender?

"Better introduce me to the boys. Always like to know the boys, you know. Glad to know you, Allender. Hello, Woods—'J. E. M.' eh! Well, if you're going to copy for me you'll have to throw that cigaroot away. Don't allow any cigaroot smokers where I am. Well, Radey, I'm off for the eats. See you later."

"But, Mr. Smith," expostulated the bewildered Mr. Radey, "I did not—"

"That's all right, old man—that's *all* right. I know how you feel about it. Felt the same way myself when I was made general manager of the Q. X. and Z. line in 1878.

"Thought the job was too much for me, but Lord bless you, it wasn't. Just imagination. Lack of confidence. I got over it, and—look at me now!

"Never mind, Radey, we'll pull you through. I'll look out for you and see that the chief despatchership doesn't weigh too heavy on your shoulders. We're all with you. Bet your bottom dollar on that, old man

"Ta, ta! I'm hungry. Be back soon and let you go home and get some much-needed rest."

"But, Mr. Smith," desperately shouted Radey, "I don't want you. I told you so in the message. I said 'Can't use you'—and I can't."

"Oh! that's all right. I copied that message myself in Palestine. I knew that the operator at 'AF' bulled it when he said 'Can't use you,' so I made it read correct, 'Can use you,' so here I am. It 'll be all right, Radey. Back in thirty minutes."

### He Got the Job.

And before the astonished and perspiring chief despatcher could utter another word A. J. S. had passed out of the door, jauntily swinging his gold-headed cane and humming an air from the latest Gilbert and Sullivan opera.

"Now, what do you-all know about that?" gasped the bewildered chief as the door closed behind the commanding figure of "AJ"—for that was what he signed—AJ. "Now what do you think about that? Hired himself, and I'm the chief despatcher and can't fire him!

"Dog-gone his skin, if he's as good a train-despatcher as he has got nerve he's sure a crackerjack, and I've never heard any one say that he wasn't a good despatcher. Dog-gone if I don't let him sit in to-night and see what he can do.

"Perhaps if he can keep that mouth of his closed he may manage to get the trains over the road without killing anybody, and

—anyhow, we're up against it for a despatcher, and Brown and Allender are about all in with doubling up, so I'll give him a chance."

And he did.

I hear you ask:

"Did AJ make good?"

Did he? Well, I should say he did. Made good and then some. But talk, and, as the Indians used to say, "stretch the long bow"—oh, me! Oh, my! That man could tell the most marvelous stories without the quiver of an eyelash, knowing that we knew that he was lying and still enjoying it.

### Alex Made Good as Despatcher.

His stories were always entertaining and often instructive, for he had boomed extensively, and had worked for pretty nearly every road on the American continent. He readily admitted that it was his mouth that usually landed him out of a job, for as to his ability there could be no question. Poor old Alex is dead now, and there is no harm in telling these little reminiscences of him and his peculiarities.

Anyway, AJ came back to the office within the hour and immediately assumed command, literally taking things out of Mr. Radey's hand, and really showing remarkable knowledge of the running of the division. Shortly afterward Mr. Radey left for home, but not until old AJ had given him an earful or two of the various and diversified positions he had held on various railroads throughout the broad land, these positions ranging from water carrier to general manager

We did not doubt the water-carrier part of it, but even to this day we have doubted the general-manager portion, although it is not without the bounds of possibility. He relieved Allender that night on third, and it seemed no effort for him to keep things running, although the entire system was new to him.

He also compelled me to quit smoking "cigaroots," as he called them, for which I devoutly thank him, or his memory. AJ had a heart in him as big as his body, and that's going some, and his pocketbook was always open—too often so—to any member of the "profession" in distress. And, believe me, they were quite numerous in and about Marshall in those days.

The chief of the secret service, or "special agents," as they were called in those days, was a well-known character, too. His name was Tignor—I do not recollect his initials and he was the father of Felix Clyde Tignor, of whom I spoke in "Old Times in Morse Shops," published some time ago.

The elder Mr. Tignor is credited with many deeds of daring in the performance of his duty, for at that time Texas was not the quiet, peaceful State that it is to-day. Portions of it were overrun by outlaws, train-robbers, and "bad men" generally, and successfully to fill the position of special agent for any railroad required a man of exceptional nerve.

Such a man was Mr. Tignor. He was the chief instrument through which the gang of farmers who operated in the vicinity of Hodge, just outside of Fort Worth, were rounded up. I do not mean the later gang, which so bothered the Fort Worth and Denver trains, but an earlier band that preyed almost exclusively upon the T. and P. Mr. Tignor died several years ago, after being retired on a pension.

There is another son who has followed in his father's footsteps; Lee Tignor, one time a deputy sheriff of Tarrant County, Texas, of which Fort Worth is the county seat. At last accounts Lee was in the secret service of the Great Northern Railway, located at St. Paul, where, from all I hear, he made a name for himself.

### News of the Old-Time Ops.

The superintendent of telegraph was Mr. W. D. Littlefield, who remained but a short time after the road was divorced from the Gould Southwestern System. He was succeeded by Mr. James W. Stacey, who had previously been chief operator for the St. Louis, Iron Mountain and Southern, a part of the Missouri Pacific System, at Little Rock, Arkansas.

Mr. Stacey lived only about two or three years after taking office, and was succeeded by his chief clerk, Mr. Fred W. Place, who filled the position for several years, dying

in harness. Mr. Place was, in turn, succeeded by his chief clerk, Mr. Frank Tremble.

Among telegraphers that have boomed at all, who has not heard of Frank Tremble? They are mighty few, believe me, for he is known from coast to coast, and from Montreal to Brownsville by the knights of the key and sounder who travel, or who have traveled.

### Passed Out the Passes.

For until the rigid laws of Texas took away from him the power, there was no telegraph operator desiring transportation to any point on the lines of the Texas and Pacific who did not receive it upon applying to Frank. And should the "tourist" be "broke"—which, by the way, was almost invariably the case—he went away rejoicing in the possession of a "piece of change."

At Fort Worth the telegraph office was presided over by Mr. George H. Neese, as manager and circuit manager. He had immediate charge of "NY" Fort Worth office, and the wires on the Rio Grande Division, from Fort Worth to El Paso.

He has been in the employ of the road for many years, and from all indications is good for many years more.

George was somewhat strict, and would never tolerate anything like a "rough-house," even in the old days, in or about his office. This discipline was at times rather hard to maintain, for at that time the average traveling telegrapher was anything but an angel, and was accustomed to doing pretty much as he pleased regardless of the wishes of his immediate superior—unless, indeed, that superior was a very popular man, like Mr. Tremble, for instance.

In that case, they would go the limit for him.

And Mr. Neese was not popular with that class of telegraphers. He had no desire to be, and he made it generally known.

There was, and is, a "Joint Track" Division, operated jointly by the Missouri, Kansas and Texas and the Texas and Pacific between Fort Worth, and, I believe, Whitesboro. I am not certain that it is Whitesboro, but anyway, it is near that town.

This Joint Track Division was under the direction of Mr. W. A. Polhemus, as superintendent, and Edward C. Rodgers, as chief despatcher, assisted by a Mr. Johnson and Mr. Carew. Mr. Polhemus remained as superintendent for many years, and was succeeded by Mr. Johnson, who also remained for a long time. Both of these gentlemen were very popular with their men.

This little Joint Track Division was a rather peculiar institution, in that officials once appointed by the two roads were then let alone. That is, the officials "higher up" seldom interfered with the superintendent and his assistants in the operation of the division.

Not much like most other divisions, where the general superintendent is always looking around, inspecting, and the general manager always asking the reason for this or the cause of that. In the case of the Joint Track Division the superintendent was placed in charge and told to go ahead and run it. And that ended it.

So long as he gave satisfaction he was retained; and the long services of both Mr. Polhemus and Mr. Johnson amply testify that their services must have been eminently satisfactory to both the Tee Pee and the M. K. and T., for these roads passed through many changes of management while the Joint Track Division was in their charge.

### "It's No Trouble to Answer Questions."

One of the best-known officials of the old-time T. and P. was Mr. George P. Turner, the general passenger and ticket agent. Mr. Turner was very popular, both socially and in railroad circles, and was preeminently a polite man.

It was he who invented the saying that for a long time was almost a trademark for the Tee Pee—and, by the way, he also invented the Tee Pee in the T. and P.'s literature—"It's no trouble to answer questions." All his station-agents had it constantly drilled into them that it was "no trouble to answer questions."

Any station employee who failed to ob-

serve this rule was dealt with sternly. Conspicuously displayed at all ticket and freight windows was a neatly printed sign which read:

IT'S NO TROUBLE TO
ANSWER QUESTIONS.

G. P. Turner,
G. P. and T. A.

When these signs were first displayed they caused considerable amusement, particularly among the rural population. The town jokesmith seized upon the chance to display his wit by calling at the ticket-office and pestering the agent with such new and original questions as:

"Say, Mister Agent, what time does the 5.45 train leave?"

Or perhaps it might be:

"Say, Mister Agent, will the six o'clock train next week be on time?"

Now, to all of these fool questions the agent, according to Mr. Turner's rule, was compelled to reply in a courteous and affable manner, no matter what the provocation.

I have known of several instances, though, in which the agent forgot himself and—Biff! Bang! Whiz! and then some. In these cases Mr. Turner was satisfied that the provocation was ample, and the guilty agents were let off with a reprimand.

The idea that the sign was a joke, or intended as such, was soon dissipated, however, and the general public began to realize what it meant; that the agents of the Texas and Pacific were always ready and willing to answer any question in regard to transportation that was asked of them. If they did not know themselves it was "no trouble" to wire Mr. Turner's office and obtain the necessary information, which was imparted to the questioner in due season.

Mr. Turner remained as general ticket and passenger agent of the road for many years. He died at his home in Dallas about ten years ago.

At Big Spring was located the division headquarters of the Rio Grande Division, of which Mr. S. F. Judy was the superintendent and Mr. E. E. Steiner chief despatcher, assisted by Mr. James R. Blaine as first-trick despatcher, Earl Miller on second, and Clarence Goodwilly on third trick.

Mr. Judy served for a number of years, being succeeded by Mr. Steiner, who remained only a short time, going to the Mexican National Lines, of which he afterward became successively superintendent, general superintendent, and general manager. Perhaps he is still there. I do not know.

Mr. Steiner was quite popular with the train and road men, but the telegraphers were not particularly fond of him. I remember that once, becoming wearied of Marshall, I requested a transfer to the Rio Grande Division temporarily, and was given the managership at Baird. As my assistant I had "Panama" Jack Kelly, and, believe me, we were two operators as independent as any in the Lone Star State, and that's saying something, for every man jack of us was independent, and took no odds from any one.

Now, at this late day, I am compelled to acknowledge that on more than one occasion we took advantage of our position and derived great pleasure from rubbing it into the officials, and especially, the train-despatchers and station-agents, whom we regarded as our hereditary enemies.

The first day Kelly and I worked at Baird we had marked Mr. Blaine, the first-trick despatcher, as our own. We imagined that he thought because we were new men he could do about as he liked with us.

## A Rough Ride for Blaine.

Pure imagination, of course, but it was stern reality with us. We at once commenced to make life as miserable as possible for him. Any one who has worked in a busy freight-division point, where there are two sets of despatchers to work with, and both demand attention at the same time, knows that such a thing is quite possible.

We immediately called him "Jingo Jim," after the nickname of the illustrious statesman who bore the same surname, and as

Jingo Jim Mr. Blaine goes down in the history of the Texas and Pacific. He did not like the cognomen, and resented it, which only made it the worse for him. When he'd call "BD" we would take our time in answering him, and when we did it would be to say something that we thought was witty, like:

"Jingo Jim, go soak your head," or "Hello Jingo! Call louder; I don't hear you."

### A Surprise for Steiner.

After two or three days of this Mr. Steiner decided to take a trip down to Baird and give us the once over. He wanted to ascertain what kind of wild animals or museum freaks had been sent to the peaceful community of Baird to work days.

Our night man, Herbert Lee, was the only man around the place who knew Mr Steiner, with the exception of our messenger "boy," an old gentleman of some seventy odd years, who, besides being our messenger and call-boy, owned and operated the only hotel in the town, the Wheatley House.

He was Mr. Wheatley himself, an ex-cow-puncher, and he sure did like us two irresponsible kids, for, you know, there was no real harm in us. Only pure, unadulterated deviltry.

Some one up the line tipped us off that E. E. S. was on No. 2, coming down to pay us a visit. Kelly and I were prepared for him. We both had silk hats, brought to Texas from the effete East, and Prince Albert coats, which were then the extreme of style in the North and East.

We went to the hotel and donned our shiny tiles and long coats, and then each buckled a belt around him and stuck a man's sized forty-five in the holster. When the train bearing the chief despatcher came to a stop at the station platform, we were right there to receive him. And, believe me, we were two sights. The entire male population of the cattle town was gathered there to witness whatever might take place.

Our shiny hats were some conspicuous among the multitude of white Stetsons, and our Prince Albert coats and white choker collars made us the observed of all.

The first man to alight was a stout, florid-faced gentleman, who stepped from the smoker and made a bee-line for the telegraph office, before which Kelly and I had taken our stand. Rushing up to the desk, he poked his head through the window; and, seeing no one about except the call-boy, he yelled:

"Wheatley, where's them two dog-gone operators?"

I overheard it, and before Mr. Wheatley could reply I had inserted my key in the door and, followed by Kelly, stepped into the office. Mr. Steiner, for it was he, gave us one good glance and let out a yell.

"Good gosh!" he screamed, red in the face. "Wheatley, take them away! Crazy! Crazy! Crazy as coots! Take 'em away, Wheatley, before I commit murder."

### Thought Ops Had Gone "Bugs."

"Excuse me, sir," remarked Kelly, stepping to the window. "Do you wish to send a telegram?"

At the same time he placed his forty-five on the shelf before him, just out of reach of the visitor's long arm.

"Send a telegram! Send a telegram! Do you know who I am?"

"No, sir; I do not know who you are, nor do I desire your acquaintance," replied Kelly in a frigid tone. "I limit my acquaintanceship to gentlemen and your conversation annoys me. Get away from that window, old splutter-face, or I'll be compelled to do you injury," and he picked up the gun, which was not loaded.

### What a Pleasant Surprise!

"I'll fire you for this," yelled the man. "I'm E. E. S. Hear me? E. E. Steiner, chief despatcher."

"Oh, is that so? Why didn't you say so at first, Mr. Steiner?" asked Kelly, extending his hand after dropping the gun.

Mr. Steiner ignored the hand and wrote out a lengthy telegram to Mr. Stacey, at Marshall, requesting that two telegraphers who had not recently graduated from Terrell—the State Insane Asylum is located at Terrell—be sent to Baird at once to relieve the two freaks he had sent out previously.

We sent the message—after revising it to suit ourselves—and then sent a joint telegram to Mr. Stacey, signed by ourselves, in which we tendered our resignations and requested return transportation to Marshall. In the mean time Mr. Steiner had gone to the Wheatley House to obtain what rest he could until the arrival of the west-bound train, which was not due for three or four hours, leaving instructions with our call-boy to be sure and call him in time to get that train.

### Two Warm Receptions.

His request was complied with in Mr. Wheatley's usual decisive and emphatic manner. That gentleman fired six shots from his forty-five through the window of the room occupied by the sleeping chief despatcher, who came from the hotel madly endeavoring to pull his feet through the sleeves of his coat and wearing his trousers around his neck.

But he caught his train back to Big Spring.

It was two days later that we were relieved and returned to Marshall, where a great reception awaited us. Two receptions, in fact. One by the gang of telegraphers employed there, was highly appreciated.

But one by Mr. J. W. Stacey, the superintendent of telegraph, while we knew it was well deserved, was not at all appreciated. Regardless of all, though, he put us both to work—me back at "FS," Marshall despatcher's office, nights, and Kelly somewhere out on the road.

Right here I must tell another on Alex Smith.

One day, shortly after my return from Baird, Smith and I were going to lunch at the Capitol Hotel, where we boarded at the time.

It was court week, and the hotel was crowded. There was one very important criminal case on the docket. What it was I do not recollect, nor does it matter, but at any rate the attorney general of the State, Mr. James S. Hogg, was present to prosecute the case.

Mr. Hogg was grooming himself at that time for the nomination for the Governorship. Upon entering the dining-room the waiter started to lead us to our regular seats, but the eagle eye of Alex spotted the attorney general seated alone at a small table. There were three vacant chairs at the table, and Alex remarked to me:

"John, there's old Jim Hogg, our next Governor. We'll eat with him."

And regardless of the expostulations of the head waiter, he steered a straight course for the table occupied by the attorney general.

"Good morning, Governor," he greeted that gentleman sociably, as he seated himself at the right of Mr. Hogg, at the same time motioning me to the seat opposite. "Beautiful weather we're having, Governor," he continued beamingly. "Allow me to introduce my young friend J. E. M., of the general office staff."

I bowed my acknowledgment as Mr. Hogg regarded Smith with a cold and penetrating look which contained no hint of recognition.

"Now, Governor," continued that self-satisfied gentleman, "I want to tell you something. Your fences right here in little old Harrison County need mending, and I'm the man to mend them for you. There's old Bill Richardson ready to flop at any moment. A word from me and he'll flop to your side.

"No, not a word of thanks, Governor; I know how you feel about it. I know just what you are about to say, Governor, but you needn't say it.

"Of course you are not yet acquainted with me. That's your misfortune. If you don't believe me, ask Reese De Graffenreid. You don't know me—that's all right. I'm Smith—A. J. Smith. Glad to make your acquaintance, Governor.

### Was Willing to Help Hogg.

"Leave it to me. I'll swing old Harrison County to my friend Jim Hogg and make it stick till Hades freezes over. I will that, and you can depend on it. Put it there."

And he extended his hand with such a friendly manner that the attorney general "put it there." They shook hands heartily, and in a few moments were conversing

like two old friends. When they left the dining-room their arms were locked and they walked over to the court-house together.

I really have no means of knowing just how much influence old Alex contributed toward the nomination and election of Mr. Hogg as Governor, but I do know that ever afterward, upon any and all occasions, he spoke of Governor Hogg as "my friend, Jim Hogg," and it is well known that he was a very welcome visitor at the executive mansion in Austin during that gentleman's tenure of office.

The Reese De Graffenreid spoken of was the company's attorney located at Longview, who was a frequent visitor to the train despatcher's office at Marshall, and a friend to all the boys. Mr. De Graffenreid was afterward, for several terms, a member of Congress from his district. He died suddenly in Washington.

About this time the road was in the hands of receivers, these officials being ex-Governor John A. Brown and Judge Lionel Sheldon, both well-known gentlemen of the Lone Star State. Under their able administration, assisted by the practical railroad knowledge of Captain John A. Grant, the general manager, the matter was soon out of the courts and the property handed back to the stockholders.

One of the very best-known conductors in the Southwest in those days was Cullen G. Womack, who had the passenger run from Marshall to New Orleans on the N. O. P. "Cannon Ball." Mr. Womack was one of those peculiar characters you meet occasionally, who are perfectly satisfied where they are, aspire to nothing higher, and never get any lower.

### Con Who Wouldn't Be Promoted.

Now, Cullen Womack had been offered promotion after promotion. When the position of trainmaster was created on the N. O. P., the first man selected for that office was Cullen G. Womack, but he declined with thanks.

When Mr. Pearsall, by reason of ill health, asked for a year's leave of absence, Mr. Womack was selected to fill the position of superintendent during his absence, but he emphatically declined the honor, preferring to pull the bell-cord and wield the punch rather than sitting in an office and issuing orders to fellows that he had known all his life.

I do not know for how many years he had this one particular run, but it was quite a long time, and when he died, about fifteen years ago, he was still wearing the blue clothes and brass buttons. He was the friend of traveling railroaders, who were always welcome to ride with "Dad" Womack, on the cushions, as far as he went.

Another well-known wielder of the ticket-punch, whose run was over the Eastern Division from Texarkana to Fort Worth, was Jim Connors, or "Smiling Jim," as he was called. I do not believe that any one had ever seen Jim Connors when he was not smiling.

If there was nothing to smile about he'd make something, and not only smile himself, but compel others to smile with him

### Banvard a Versatile Genius.

Then there was Charlie Banvard, the conductor-operator-train-despatcher, who ran the local from Longview Junction to Texarkana.

Charlie could fill almost any position on the road. He was a gilt-edged telegrapher; as a train-despatcher he was not to be excelled. He had at one time been chief clerk to the division superintendent, and at another time general yardmaster at Fort Worth or Dallas, and what he did not know about train rules and running trains was not worth knowing.

Whenever the "powers that be" were caught short-handed in any department, Banvard was invariably called in to fill the place until a regular man could be secured. It was no unusual thing to find him one night pounding brass and OSing trains at some small way-station, and the next day punching tickets on the Cannon Ball.

I have, in my rather diversified career, met some men who could fill two or three railroad positions in a very satisfactory manner, but I doubt if I ever ran across another man like Banvard. He appeared to have no limitations.

He was at home in any capacity, and I doubt not that should the occasion have arisen, and a general manager been called for at a moment's notice, Charles A. Banvard would have filled the bill in a very acceptable manner.

The last I heard of him he was running a passenger-train out of Little Rock, Arkansas, on the St. Louis, Iron Mountain and Southern, but that was some fifteen or twenty years ago, and I have never heard any of the old-timers mention him since. Perhaps he may read this, if he is in the land of the living. If so, I'd like to hear from him.

Another versatile man was Charlie Kinney, one-time telegrapher in the East Dallas yard office. Mr. Kinney was a first-class operator, but was not fond of office work, so he resigned and went on the road braking for a few trips.

Then he returned to the yard office at East Dallas and took the position of general yardmaster at that point a month or two later. This position he filled for many years, in a more than acceptable manner. Perhaps he is still there, but some one told me a few months ago that he had retired

He was a popular man with all the rails, and any boomer who had anything about him to prove that he was what he represented himself to be, was sure of a welcome and of a ride anywhere that he wished to go on the T. and P., if Kinney could get it for him—and it was seldom that he could not.

Oh! those were fine old times on the Tee Pee, when every one knew every one else, and the whole road was one happy family.

Sometimes we got "canned," of course, but that was to be expected. Then the canned one would cease to be a member of our family and another took his place.

There was no red tape; no nonsense. If a man could do the work assigned to him he had the job. If he could not he was told to look elsewhere for employment. Ability counted, not physical perfection, and there were no examining physician's fees to pay before entering the service.

Fine times, gentlemen, fine times!


# WHO DARES?

**WANTED—An assayer, gold. Must be experienced, with strong references. Man desired who can keep mouth shut when approached by competitors. No job for a weakling. Good fighters can apply. Salary $5,000, with year's contract. More if can make good. This is no job for adventure hunters. Hard work, hard fighting, good food and lodging. Apply after eleven o'clock, on or after April 12th, Radcliff, Argonaut Gold Mining Corporation, of Nevada; Fifteenth floor, Blakeworth Building, New York City.**

**WOULD you have answered this advertisement—especially if a pretty girl had dared you to take the position? Jimmy Webb—mining engineer and adventurer into the out-of-the-way places of the wide world—did. He dared. And in daring he became involved in a deep and dangerous mystery. If you want to know all about it read Loring Brent's great action serial, which starts in next week's Railroad Man's Magazine: :: Look for WHO DARES?**

# ERIC OF THE STRONG HEART.

BY VICTOR ROUSSEAU.

A FIVE-PART STORY—PART FOUR.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

ERIC SILVERSTEIN, a retiring and studious New Yorker of means, was the son of Leontieff, a Russian nobleman who had married a Jewish lady secretly. Assuming the name of Silverstein, she had gone to New York, while Leontieff had gone on an expedition to the far north and had never returned. Eric's mother had told him stories of a mysterious ice bound city called Rangarok, the stories told her by her husband, and which Eric repeated to his chum, Ralph Wiston.

One night, in a Bowery museum, Eric saw a beautiful girl, strangely dressed, who, with her two servants, Knut, a giant, and Egbert, a dwarf, were being exhibited as freaks. Eric understood her speech, which was pure Anglo-Saxon, and rescued her and her servants. He placed them aboard a Norse long-boat, moored to a quiet East River pier. She told him that she was the Princess Editha, daughter of King Theobald, who ruled over the Anglian people of Rangarok under the Danish oppressor, King Harald Deerfoot, who had tried to force her to marry him. To escape this fate and to seek aid for her people she had crossed the Atlantic in search of Vineland, the story of its discovery having come down through the ages to her. Not understanding American customs, or our language, she had been inveigled into the museum.

Eric determined to bring about the marriage of Editha and his ideal man, Ralph. But when the day came she changed into a raving fury and tried to kill him. He escaped and the long boat sailed away. Eric organized an expedition to find Rangarok, and took Ralph with him. At a European port they picked up Bjorn, a Norwegian, who told them more legends of Rangarok.

Far to the north Eric, Ralph, and Bjorn, while in a small boat, were deserted by the crew, who sailed away in the yacht. Driven by a great storm through a narrow passage in the ice pack they sighted land. When they landed they were met by the high priest of Loki and some Danish warriors, who took them toward Rangarok. On the journey they were captured by the Trolls, a race of dwarfs with hypnotic powers. In their city they met Editha, who was under the influence of Haggudra, a witch. She greeted Eric and Ralph cordially, but later tried to murder them.

Upon their arrival at Rangarok they were taken to the citadel. Asgeld told them that, according to custom, one of their party would have to draw the great sword of Odin from its sheath of rock or defeat King Harald in fair fight, or they would be sacrificed to Odin. But if they accomplished either task they would become rulers of the land.

The next day Bjorn warned Eric to beware of Ralph. They were taken to the temple of Odin, which had been built on a top of a volcanic peak. On the altar there was an arrangement to drop those standing there into the volcanic fire below. Eric, Ralph, and Bjorn all failed to withdraw the sword, although Bjorn almost succeeded. In the tourney Ralph was defeated by Harald, but Eric overthrew the king. Eric was proclaimed king. At the feast that night he was betrothed to Editha, who tried to murder him. He was set upon by Harald's followers, but in the midst of the fight Editha's sanity returned, and she helped him escape. They joined a revolutionary force outside the city. Eric and Editha went to the Trolls' city to force Haggudra to remove the spell on the princess. While they were there the madness came upon her, and Eric was captured by the Trolls, who prepared to butcher him.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### THE BLACK KNIGHT.

A HEAVY rain began to fall in great splotches of water. The Trolls looked up toward the clouds with anxious faces. They seemed to be deliberating, nodding to one another and pursing up their little lips. Then a vivid flash of lightning rent the sky from end to end, followed by a crashing peal of thunder.

Instantly all was confusion. The Trolls took to their heels, butcher and all. I lay there in utter darkness, trying frantically to free myself. At last I burst through the cocoon with my right arm.

I tore the filmy stuff from me, plucking it away, rending great strips from arms and body and legs. Very softly I managed to make my way through the open gate and

to crawl stealthily along the deserted street toward the side of the cliff.

Laboriously I began to make the ascent. But, drenched with rain, and bleeding from the sharp rocks, I resolved to wait till morning before attempting to proceed farther.

With morning light the Trolls would be powerless, and Editha, free to come and go, might find me. Or I might find her.

And very soon the dawn began to break. The saffron streak in the sky yielded to yellow. I could see the outlines of the trees and rocks about me.

I looked downward toward the Troll city. But I could see nothing except the bare hillside.

Suddenly I sprang to my feet with a shout of rage. There was no city nor any precipice. I had been lying upon my side out in the open, near the three dwarf fir-trees, plucking great bunches of coarse grass and weeds and casting them over my body.

The whole scene had been illusion, hypnotism, one of those grotesque tricks that the Trolls loved to play, one of those cunning and half-malevolent pranks for which they had been famous ever since modern races had come to live among them.

But—how far back did the illusion go? I knew that I had seen Haggudra, and she had escaped me, though Bjorn's sword was still strapped upon my thigh. I knew that Editha had been with me.

Only, in the end, the Troll magic had beaten me. I had fought it with Egbert's magic—but I had knotted the skein.

I felt as helpless as a child. My whole being, my heart, my mind, all that was of me, cried for Editha. And, groaning her name, I sank down in the grass.

I heard a movement near me. I looked up, and, in incredulous joy, I saw her coming toward me. She kneeled down at my side and put her arms about my neck.

"What doth my lord desire?" she murmured.

"Editha, thee and thee only. Where have we been this night?"

"Here, my lord, for dost thou not remember how thou didst grow weary and bid me prepare the meal from the flour we carried in the saddle-bags, and sing to thee while thou didst rest? And the deep sleep that fell on thee lasted even till now. Verily, I think some spell was cast on thee and me, for I have dreamed fearful but now forgotten things under these trees, which are sacred to the god of the Trolls."

I rose and put my arms about her. In the east the sun was rising. The long rays turned the land to gold.

I looked at Editha, searching her eyes with all my soul. There she stood, looking back at me with love and worship. And the sun was rising!

"But what of our journey hither?" I asked of her.

"Truly," she answered with sweet dignity, "it was not for me to require his purpose of my lord, whom I obey."

And I knew that she remembered nothing.

Our horse was standing where I had fastened him. I mounted and placed Editha before me, and we started back along the way we had come. And, in the glorious morning, the shadows of the night seemed a dream to me, and Editha everything. I hardly even thought of Ralph, in the joy of returning with her, whole-minded and sane.

The only little cloud upon my happiness was that, when I discreetly questioned her about her cure, she seemed to have forgotten everything about the spell that had lain on her.

Well, I knew that was the way when such cases are cured; the double or other self sinks back into the normal personality and is forgotten.

And thus I turned that little grief to joy, and we rode on together until, topping a rise, I saw a herd of horses being driven slowly by three mounted hinds, and near by a knight, in complete armor, vizored and helmeted, who was evidently in charge of them.

We saw him as he saw us. He turned his horse and rode swiftly toward us. As he drew near I saw that his armor was black, flashing back no rays from the sunlight.

He carried a black shield having on it the device of a knight trampling on a jester,

looking as fresh as if it had been painted yesterday; and, in the jester's face, I discovered an uncomfortable resemblance to my own.

He galloped swiftly toward us, wheeled, and circled us, surveying Editha and myself through the bars of his vizor, which did not permit us the slightest glimpse of his face. Then, retiring, he suddenly came galloping at full speed toward me, his lance at rest, but couched.

The maneuver was so sudden that I had only time to drop Editha to the ground and draw my sword, when he was upon me. The lance-point caught the pommel of my saddle, where Editha had rested, and the momentum of the rider's charge swept the saddle from the broken girths, carrying me to the ground.

Half stunned by the shock of the fall, I waited for the death-stroke. But death in that way was not my antagonists's motive.

As Editha ran between us, her hands outstretched, pleading for me, he leaned over his horse's neck, and, raising her in his arms, despite her struggles, placed her upon the saddle of his own horse, holding her secure there in the grip of his steel-clad arms. And he shouted to the hinds.

I was on my feet, but already the three were upon me, trampling me down. Buffeted by the hoofs of the horses, I struggled ineffectively to reach my enemy, being knocked down again and again until at last I lay bleeding and all but unconscious.

Across a whirling panorama I saw a dozen knights, each holding Editha. I saw the herd come trotting up, heard the knight shout again; and then, to my horror, I was being strapped securely to three of the horses.

One leg was placed across the neck of one and fastened within the halter, the other leg upon the neck of another. The third was girthed, and to this my arms were strapped.

When all was complete, at another command from the night, the hinds began to lash the horses.

They started at a furious bound, carrying me with them, dangling limply between, writhing and twisting and groaning with the pain.

My limbs were almost torn from their sockets.

To be torn asunder was the fate in store for me, and awaited only the moment when the three beasts, or any two of them, should separate.

On dashed the horses, luckily keeping stride together. We passed the valley and began to ascend the next rise. Then I saw two more men, seated on horseback, watching me from the crest, and again looking toward the knight and Editha riding along the valley in the direction of Rangarok.

Suddenly one of them leaped to the ground and drew a bow from his back. I saw him fit his arrow and aim it at me. And that death seemed more merciful than the one which appeared imminent.

The horses would pass within a hundred paces of him. At such a moment a hit was a remote possibility. I closed my eyes as the great bow bent, and prayed that God would direct his aim unerringly.

I heard the twang of the bow and the hiss of the arrow through the air. And suddenly, with a jerk that caused me to scream out with pain, the horses stopped. My head went downward.

The beast that held my arms had fallen dead in its stride, shot through the heart. The fall released my arms from the girth, and now, freed from the dead weight, the other two turned and galloped back toward the herd, my legs outstretched upon their backs, my body twisted between them, the flashing hoofs passing within a few inches of my head at every movement.

Opening my eyes, I saw the archer fitting a second arrow to his bow. The distance was half as great again. A hit was clearly impossible.

Yet, before he could mount and ride in pursuit, death might overtake me, and again I prayed that he would shoot true. And again the incredible happened.

One of the two horses suddenly reared, blood gushing from its mouth and nostrils, and plunged forward, fortunately releasing my leg from the halter as it did so.

With a desperate effort I managed to twist my body sidewise until I caught the flowing mane of the one horse which now carried me.

I pulled myself into a sitting posture, grasped the halter, and somehow unfastened it. Next instant I had been flung heavily to the ground, and the whole horse and the wounded one dashed on together.

I sat up dizzily. Far in the distance, riding down the valley, I saw the knight with Editha in his arms, hardly larger than ants against the morning sun.

I saw one of the watchers on the hill, who had dismounted with his companion, leap into the saddle and gallop furiously after them. The other came toward me.

I looked up into the face of Sweyn.

And then I fainted.

At least, I was just conscious of him bending over me, crying to me, and urging me to rise. Perhaps only a few minutes passed before I forced consciousness back upon her throne.

But what I had lost during those moments I was only to learn later.

When at length I managed to rise, I found that the second horseman had returned and was sitting on his horse beside me, leading my own.

It was hardly a surprise to me to discover that this was Bjorn.

"Editha!" I cried wildly

"We know," said Sweyn. "Bjorn rode after them, in the hope of capturing him, but he saw that it was impossible, for, though the knight's horse carries two, it is fresh, and Bjorn and I have ridden all night. We rode in search of you."

"If Ralph were alive and here!" I groaned.

I saw the pair exchange glances. Then Bjorn made some subtle sign to Sweyn, the meaning of which I neither understood nor wished in my weakened state to understand.

"There is one chance," said Sweyn, after a moment of hesitation. "They are riding for Rangarok, for he is one of a band of Harald's knights that rode out at midnight and have been driving horses and cattle, and leaving a trail of fire and death behind them

"But they must make a détour to return, for our forces are on the move, we having deemed it best to leave Harald no time to organize. If our surprise fails, we may still hope to wear him down by siege.

"Now, if we follow this road, we may head them off at the last pass before the city. Therefore, since we cannot leave you, and since one man will be no match for the murderous knight, try to ride with us, for the sake of the Lady Editha."

His words filled me with new strength and resolution. I drank eagerly from a flask he handed me, and placed a little bread in my saddle-bags to munch along the road, if I were able. And I managed to clamber into the saddle

We started at a walk, and for the few first minutes it was all I could do to keep my seat. But gradually my head began to clear, and the intensity of my purpose drove my aches away.

We put our horses to their steady gait, and began to reel off the miles that separated us from the pass before Rangarok.

After about an hour, reaching the summit of the range, and halting to breathe our horses, I saw a sight that set my heart to beating fast.

In the distance rose the peak of Rangarok, with the palace and colleges, and, clear in the bright sunlight, the spiral stairs, like threads against the masonry.

Under us was a fertile valley, extending to the last pass among the foot-hills, of which Sweyn had spoken. And all along the road that pierced it were the still-smoking ruins of burned farmhouses and cottages.

But we were not looking at these. We were looking toward the pass; and, halfway between it and the summit on which we rested, I saw the knight, with Editha on the saddle before him, riding at such a rapid pace, to judge from the little cloud of dust that rose behind him.

"There, at those ruins made by him and his band, he must turn and skirt the mountains," said Sweyn, stretching out his arm. "For now look eastward!"

I turned my eyes in the direction that he indicated, and saw a long, rolling dust rising against the hills. And, out of the cloud, I saw a serpent crawling, and the glitter of arms, and riders spread out fanwise on each side of it.

It was the Anglian army, moving on Rangarok. And it was clear that it must

reach the pass well before the knight on horseback

"Now, if you are rested, O my lord Eric," said Sweyn, looking at me keenly, with a new deference in his manner, "we will ride at the top of our speed into the pass; and it shall go hard with him if he come within bowshot."

I answered nothing, but set spurs to my horse, and we raced like the wind down into the valley. Horsemen and army were alike concealed behind the undulating ground in front of us.

On we rode with the wind on our faces, past ruined farms, past bodies of murdered men—and women, too—unheeding, not stopping to see whether any survivors of Harald's treachery lurked in the ruins.

When our tired horses flagged we spurred them to new efforts, giving them only the merest breathing spaces. Perhaps a full hour later we clambered up the foot-hills and saw the last pass dip down beneath us

Sweyn shouted in joy and pointed ahead of us.

There, at the other end of the pass, rode the black-armored knight, with Editha on his saddle, lying like one in a faint. He might have been three miles away, but in the clear air he looked hardly beyond bowshot.

And hardly farther eastward came the mounted vanguard of the Anglians, and behind them, out of the dust-clouds, rolled the column of swordsmen, pikemen, archers, with their wagons and carts, their tents and their equipment, trailing far away into the distance.

The knight had balked us after all, for he had ridden straight along the road, judging the slow speed of a moving army better than we.

Yet, weary as our horses were, there was still the chance of a rescue. We urged them on again, raced into the pass, climbed up the other side, and drove them along the level plain toward the city.

Two miles, perhaps, divided us, but it was hardly four to Rangarok. Our horses hardly felt the spur. They moved with weary limbs, galvanizing them now and again into a trot, but oftener subsiding into a slow walk, with drooping heads and foam-flecked bridles, and the sweat pouring down them.

All at once Bjorn's horse collapsed, toppled, and left him lying beside it upon the grassy meadow.

"Onward!" cried Bjorn as we reined in. "I'll warn the scouts behind us"

I dug my spurs into my mount's bleeding flanks. As if feeling the force of my will, he broke into a gallop

He passed Sweyn's steed, laboriously tugging at his bridle, and carried me on, roaring and trembling, with his ears laid back and a convulsive quiver agitating him at every stride. But we were gaining!

A mile between us!

I saw the knight look back. I saw the gates of Rangarok before us, two miles away.

The chance was still a desperate one, but hope was growing.

My horse gathered power from me, I verily believe, and the interval rapidly decreased as I measured it with straining eyes and aching heart.

Once, looking back, I saw the vanguard of the army, a hundred mounted scouts, perhaps, spread over the plain, galloping to my aid. Bjorn had warned them; but they were three miles away, and the race was between myself and the black knight. And now the walls of Rangarok loomed up above me. The gates were closed. My heart leaped up in triumph.

Two hundred yards between us and four to the walls! I shouted madly, and I believe the wind bore my frantic cry to the knight, for he looked back and bent over his steed

At the gates I would catch him. Unarmed as I was, I meant to tear Editha from him and strike him down. I urged my horse to a supreme effort.

I saw the gates swing open. My enemy was nearing the moat. Down came the drawbridge with the rattle and clank of chains, while I was still fifty yards away.

Once more I dug my spurs deep into my horse's flanks. Three bounds—and the fugitive was hardly yet within the gates.

But the drawbridge began to rise, and, even as my horse's hoofs struck upward

to gain it, the edges of the beams caught him in the belly and hurled him backward, flinging me to the ground.

The massive gates behind began to close.

Within the walls, climbing the long street toward the citadel, I saw the black knight, carrying Editha.

As I rose in some wild hope born out of my anguish, my horse turned his head and looked at me with a pathetic gaze of grief, stumbled, fell, and died.

It was only a beast's life for Editha, but I bent over him and was not ashamed to feel the tears in my eyes as I did so. Raising my head hopelessly, I heard the thudding of hoofs upon the turf, and saw the vanguard of the Anglian army galloping toward me.

Suddenly, to my astonishment, the bridge swung down again, and the gates began to open. In compact array, the Anglians dashed past me, across the moat, and into Rangarok, leaving me standing there agape and wondering.

From within the city came the sound of wild cheering. I rose and crossed the drawbridge, and passed inside the walls No one molested me, nobody knew me. But armed men were pouring out from the houses, and women waved scarfs, and, as before, flowers came fluttering down, littering the road.

At last I understood. Rangarok had opened her gates to the approaching army! It had admitted the knight, not daring to reveal the compact with Sweyn's men until it was sure; and, by the same token, not knowing me, it had closed its gates upon me.

Far up the long street I saw the black knight toiling, and high above his head I saw the walls and bridges of the inner city. The sight galvanized me into life.

From among the horsemen who continued to stream past me a man swung his beast toward me, and halted it with a jerk that made it rear. It was Sweyn on a fresh mount.

He sprang to the ground and thrust the bridle into my hand.

"Take this horse, my lord Eric, and ride as your heart desires!" he cried.

I did not waste a word in answer, but was in the saddle at a bound. I dashed among the cavalry. Somebody recognized me, cried out my name, and in a trice all knew me.

The black knight's spent steed was still some distance from the citadel, but the cheering mob impeded me, and I could only shout to them to stand aside, and dodge beneath the flowers hurled at me, and gallop as best I might through the ranks of our own men, pressed together within the narrow confines of the roadway.

At last I was through them. I led them.

I pointed and shook my hand and shouted. Our horses' hoofs thundered over the stones together.

Too late! The inner gates swung open. The black knight passed them, and, even as we hurled our steeds against them, they closed by the same invisible agency, and we halted, baffled, without

Reining in, I saw the fugitive, with Editha stretched across his saddle-bow, circle the winding ramp of the bridge. He halted at the top, looked back, and waved his hand.

Curses—good, sturdy English oaths—broke from the lips of our men. They yelled and shook their fists.

But suddenly the inner wall was lined with helmets, and from their stations behind the walls the archers poured a flight of arrows into us through the loopholes.

The hum of the missiles filled the air. Before them man and beast went down. Instantly all was confusion, and the horsemen, not deigning to retire, and yet not knowing what to do, tried to control their steeds, plunging hither and thither under the galling arrows.

To stay was madness. I galloped in front of the men and waved my hand for the withdrawal. Slowly and sullenly our baffled vanguard drew back toward the lower city, leaving a dozen fallen warriors before the walls.

Thus was the issue set. The foot-guards were already beginning to enter the walls. Our return, the sight of the empty saddles and the wounded men, infuriated them to the point of shouting for an instant attack. But Sweyn held them in hand.

The tents were pitched in a large, open square in the heart of the town, and before evening the investment of the citadel was completed.

All through that night, while we sat in counsel, we heard the creaking wagons entering the town, carrying the siege weapons and equipment. And till daylight we talked of our plans for Harald's overthrow.

"You will accept the leadership now?" asked Sweyn of me.

I rose up in the assembly.

"I will accept!" I cried, remembering the pressure of Editha's lips on mine. For who but I now had the right to rescue her?

But even as I spoke, the thought of Ralph, dead for me, sent a chill through my heart

## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE BATTLE FOR RANGAROK.

THE unexpected arrival of the siege train—Harald's, and built by him for operations against a distant city—made an immediate attack a possibility. The secret of construction of these massive implements had been discovered, and the Danes in charge of them overpowered

More fortunate still was the fact that these engines were found to have just been completed, and to be ready for transportation on the heavy country carts to any destination, where they could be set up

There were three sectional towers on wheels, which could be put together in a few hours, and moved forward at the rate of a mile a day.

Each of them was, when assembled, forty feet high, with wheels twelve feet in diameter and three feet thick. It had three floors, the top one for the archers, the middle one for the men at arms, and the lowest for the ram or catapult. From the summit a drawbridge could also be lowered.

After the multitude of councilors had spoken, Sweyn arose, turning toward me.

"Now, my lord Eric, we have heard how all counsel an immediate attack on the citadel," he said, "seeing that Harald's men are few and his reenforcements, which might entrap us within these walls, cannot arrive for a whole quarter-moon. Hear my own counsel.

"Against this we must set the fact that the walls of the citadel are strong and the bridges easily defensible. It were better to take the fortress by stratagem."

"How can that be?" they asked eagerly.

"I will reveal something known only to a few," he answered, "and learned even by me, who am King Theobald's son, and of a Danish mother, by accident. The spring which supplies the palace with water rises among the rocks behind it, bubbling up and disappearing from view again.

"But underground it merges with a wide river, the same that flows through the morasses northward, where no wall has ever been built, since the place is believed impassable.

"There is a secret road which can be followed by a party of our men, leading into the heart of the citadel, along the river course, so that only a hundred paces separate the end of it from the palace spring.

"Let us, then, assault the walls in force, but as a feint, to be developed into a real attack if it promises success; but meanwhile let three hundred men follow the secret path into the keep. What say you, my lord?" he continued, turning to me.

"An excellent plan," I answered.

"Good!" said Sweyn promptly. "Then, since it meets your favor, you yourself shall lead the surprise."

"And you?" I asked.

"It is meet that I should head the attack upon the walls, to hearten our people."

Animated discussion broke out at this. Myself I cared little what part was assigned to me, so long as I could avenge Ralph and save Editha from her dreadful fate

At length Sweyn's plans were agreed upon, and it was settled that Bjorn and I should take the party of three hundred, to surprise Harald in his palace and, after overcoming him, open the gates to the besiegers.

Furthermore, it was decided that the at-

tack should begin late on the following afternoon, so that it would be at its height about the time when we were starting on our journey along the stream

"But who, save you, knows the secret passage?" I asked.

Sweyn called from his palace, and his attendant entered—the man Wolf, whom I had seen on the preceding evening.

Looking at him, I thought his face was vaguely familiar, and at last I identified him in my mind as one of the Danes who had drunk and sung with Ralph in the stockade upon the night of our arrival in the country.

The recognition was very pleasing to me, for he must have known of Ralph's fate—at least, in so far as any of us could.

"Wolf, the son of Ethelred, knows of the secret way, for his father hewed away the débris that had choked the spring after the upflaming of Loki's fire, in the year of the massacre," he said. "And he will guide us, for he knows where his interest lies."

Afterward I spoke to Wolf of our former meeting, and was surprised at the look of confusion on his face. I did not press him when he denied himself, feeling sure that some harmless motive lay behind his action. However, I mentioned the matter to Sweyn.

"Aye," he answered indifferently, "he is half Danish and half Anglian, like many of us. And they say we always turn from one allegiance to another, as I have turned from mine."

"But you have chosen rightly, Sweyn," I answered.

On the next day, at dawn, preparations for the assault were being busily carried forward, the engines having been put together by skilful workmen during the night.

There was a space of more than an arrow's flight between the topmost houses of Rangarok and the citadel. Hither we sent our men, and marshaled them—some nine thousand—against perhaps three thousand of Harald's.

By noon the keep had been completely invested for about three-fourths of its circumference, to the point on either side where the precipice of the peak sloped sheer to the morasses, buttressed on each flank by a great tower.

At intervals along our line archers were stationed, to run forward and shoot if any concentration of the enemy appeared upon the bridges. Behind them were marshaled the men-at-arms, carrying pikes; there were also five companies of swordsmen, completely armored, and facing each of three towers that commanded the approach to each of the three great spiral bridges.

Then, with a creaking, grumbling sound, the three siege towers, which had been moved forward during the night, were pushed toward the walls, each drawn by three dozen men, concealed beneath the protecting sides.

Instantly the walls of the citadel became alive with men, a great shout of laughter went up, and a flight of arrows was discharged at the ponderous, slow-moving engines.

They stuck and quivered in the wooden walls, but the towers moved onward slowly, and, seeing that their attempts were fruitless, the archers saved their missiles and crowded the platform beneath the parapet, over which their bronze helmets appeared They were evidently studying our maneuvers.

Hours passed at this diversion, for the towers moved only by inches, creaking and rocking on their great wheels, and seeming as if about to overturn, but always moving inexorably toward the walls, until at last they came to a halt, not more than a dozen yards distant.

Still no arrows came from the parapet.

The tower opposite the central span stood overtopping the walls, but not the tower of stone, which faced it about at an equal height. Then, with a slow, clanking motion, two drawbridges began to descend, revealing the serried ranks of the archers upon the upper platform, and on the lower a phalanx of men-at-arms, with sword in hand and shield on arm.

Down went the drawbridges, till the lower one rapped on the stone coping of the walls, while the upper, gliding askew, touched the summit of the stone tower opposite. And instantly the parapets of Rangarok became alive.

Out of the stone tower leaped a dozen Danes, yelling and brandishing great battle-axes, their round shields held before them. But as they leaped for the drawbridge the archers poured a flight of arrows into them.

At so short a range every missile struck home. Down went the Danes, sheer into the five-hundred-foot fall between the walls and the peak, and from the lower drawbridge the men-at-arms streamed forth and gained the walls.

Instantly the reserve bodies of our pikemen ran streaming forward to support them. For a few minutes the Anglians beat back the defenders and seemed to have gained the parapet.

Then, with a mighty shout, a huge man leaped from the tower. He wielded a great, two-handed sword, and at his appearance a mighty roar came from a thousand throats within.

It was King Harald.

Wielding his great weapon, he flung himself forward at the head of his rallying supporters. Anglian and Dane were intermingled, and the clashing sound of sword and ax was continuous as the chattering of a knife-grinder's wheel.

But above this sound came a deeper, louder one, like a succession of subterranean explosions. A great stone seemed to shake itself out of the walls and rolled down, splintering into fifty fragments. It was the work of the battering-ram in the central tower, wielded by twelve of our strongest men at work on the defenses.

Simultaneously the two other towers had reached the walls and disgorged their men. Smoke began to drift along the parapet. The Danes, within the tower, were hurling bunches of flaming tow against the wooden structures.

Sweyn was here, there, and everywhere, disregarding the arrows that came fast from the walls, shouting his orders, while his men advanced methodically in columns and lines to support the assailants.

For a moment the mock attack seemed about to meet with unanticipated success.

"Now go, and God be with you!" he cried to me as, on horseback, I waited with Bjorn at a vantage point behind the lines.

The sun had set, and darkness was coming on apace, though it was only the middle of the afternoon. We galloped at full speed back into the town, skirting the houses and descending toward the head of the marshes, where Wolf, with our chosen three hundred, awaited us.

But I looked back before the walls faded from sight, and saw a great pillar of flame leap upward from one of the towers, fired by the tow. More I could not see, but through the smoke I fancied I could discern that our men were still pouring out of the towers and holding their own against King Harald's broadsword. Above the uproar could be heard the punching thud of the rams.

Then Bjorn and I were in the valley, and our men were drawn up to welcome us. Bjorn turned to me.

"My lord," he said, "this is a perilous business, and unless Sweyn's attack hold, it must meet defeat. For our only hope is that Harald will have drawn all his reserves of fighting men to meet the attack. Therefore let us hasten, seeing that many lives depend upon it."

"Be it so," I answered.

Wolf took the lead, and we followed him in a long, winding column of twos. At first we sank more than ankle-deep in the marshy ground, and Wolf hurried to and fro, plunging a long stick here and there into the swamps, while the darkness increased, and we chafed at the waiting.

Sweyn's assault, if it failed, must be pressed home until we had reached our destination; and each minute's delay might mean a life.

A dreadful price to pay! At last, when our impatience had reached fever-heat, Wolf shouted and pointed to a tiny trail, hardly discernible, among the rushes. So we began our march.

It was firm footing, but no wider than two men might travel abreast. Bjorn and I were at the head of the column, with Wolf ahead of us, walking now as if he were sure of his way.

Presently the peak of Rangarok again loomed up above us. All around us were the mountains; the city had sunk out of sight behind a crest, and it was eery in

that solitude, broken only by the cries of the wild fowl as they fled from this unaccustomed molestation of their secret haunts.

There was, however, a dull undercurrent of sound from Rangarok, deflected by the hills until it seemed to pervade the air everywhere; and once I thought I caught against a cloud a gleam of the reflected light from the burning tower.

We went on, now following the path beside the river, along which Sweyn and Editha and I had come that night.

I recognized the scene. Above us was the towering peak, here a sheer precipice, and somewhere in the footing of those rocks was the earth-hole through which we had fled.

Bjorn hurried ahead and halted Wolf, and beckoned to me to come.

"Now show us our destination," he said.

Wolf stretched out his hand toward an outjutting pile of rocks that barred our approach, three hundred yards ahead of us.

"Behind that," he said, "is the streamlet that flows into the river. It is the same that rises in the rocks behind the palace and flows underground.

"From that rock to the spring is barely a hundred steps up-hill, and that is the only point at which the cliff can be scaled. Two hundred steps more, and you reach the foundations of the palace itself.

"A hundred more, and you are within the citadel. And, since the ground is firmer here, it would be well to draw up your men in lines, twelve abreast, which is the breadth between marsh and marsh."

I called softly to the captain of the leading company, which was straggling up behind me, and bade him transmit the order. I heard it whispered from rank to rank, and presently our three hundred had adjusted themselves to the new formation.

Meanwhile, Bjorn was testing the extension of the firm ground, moving step by step toward the river until he stood on its bank, fifty yards away. Then he came back.

"I find no swamp here, Wolf," he said.

Wolf shook his head.

"Nay, my lord, I did not say that there were swamps everywhere," he answered. You may stand on firm ground one moment, and, at the next step, plunge waist-deep into a bog

"This is due to the subterranean springs. However, within a space in which twelve men can stand abreast the ground is firm."

I turned to the leading captain again

"Bid your men advance softly," I ordered. "Beyond that rock we ascend the cliff. Let them neither speak nor let their swords clatter. At the summit we win Rangarok."

I heard a buzz of subdued excitement behind me, in spite of my order. Then we went on, Wolf advancing rapidly in front of us till he was almost lost to view. I whispered as loudly as I dared, but he did not hear me. So I went on ahead of Bjorn to slow his speed.

I saw him round the rock, and followed him. And then I stood still, my tongue cleaving against my teeth.

For a squadron of a hundred knights, heavily armed and carrying lances at rest, awaited us. And at their head, with vizor down, was the black knight.

I saw the mocking smile upon Wolf's face, and drew my sword to cut him down. But he was dodging in and out among the hoofs of the horses, and as I stopped my pursuit and tried to shout a warning I saw Bjorn appear.

Our cries rang out together. But already the head of the column was appearing round the rock. Six men sprang from the saddle and flung themselves upon us.

I had no time to get purchase for my blow, which glanced harmlessly off the armor of my nearest assailant. I looked up and saw that it was the black knight, his vizor still over his face.

I heard him laugh, and the sword was struck from my hand, while a blow from the flat of his laid me prostrate in the mire.

Bjorn, fighting valiantly, had been overpowered as well. And, lances in rest, the squadron charged in a resistless mass upon our men

Roars from the Danes, an answering cry that quavered and broke, and the horsemen were harrying our surprised and helpless footmen as the wolf harries a sheep-flock.

Backward they drove them, till they had edged them into the swamps beside the river, a mob now, each seeking safety and not finding it.

They rode them down, they forced them deeper into the morasses, into the ice-cold stream. I closed my eyes, waiting for the instantaneous death-stroke.

But through my closed eyelids I seemed to see the last helpless stand of those whom I had led to death, I heard the bubbling cries of the drowning, the screams of those stricken to death; and then, once more, the roaring cheers of the Danes upon the walls of the citadel, and fewer counter-cries from Sweyn's brave followers.

There was nothing that I desired better than death at that moment. Even Editha had become but a misty shadow.

But no blow fell, and when I looked up I saw the black knight regarding me. He had put up his vizor, and the face was Ralph Wiston's.

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## CHAPTER XX.

### THE PACT OF DEATH.

I HAVE written of him hitherto as my friend; I have justified him, and I do so still. For I have no doubt that the hardships and the perils had turned his brain, so that even now I can call him my friend, and think of him as I had known him till that moment.

Yet my heart went sick with horror, and the hate in his eyes and the sneer on his lips made the episode seem less real than any of our fantastic adventuring since we passed through the many evolutions of the ice-pack.

"So the horses didn't tear you, Eric!" he mocked.

It was impossible to answer him; I think he expected no answer, for at a sign from him two of his men caught me roughly about the body, and two others seized Bjorn, and they began to drag us up the hill, then into a rock tunnel—one of many that I perceived in the friable cliff.

After a short journey through pitch-darkness we emerged into a stone cell, lit by great candles that flickered on the walls and cast wavering shadows on the flagged floor.

In one corner was a great heap of rushes, which evidently had served as the bed for some unhappy prisoner before us. Above it was a tiny barred window, but the light that filtered in was so faint and dim that nothing could be seen without.

The two Danes who held me now released me, and Bjorn's captors set him free also, pointing, not unkindly, toward the rushes.

We flung ourselves down in utter exhaustion. The Danes, reaching up their great hands, extinguished the candles one by one and went out, locking the door with a ponderous, foot-long key. So we were left alone.

For hours we did not speak. My heart was too full, and the screams of our dying men still rang in my ears. I fell into a sort of swooning trance at last, from which I was aroused by the touch of Bjorn's hand on my shoulder.

"You were not to blame, Eric," he said in the old, friendly fashion, as if misfortune had once more made us equals.

"I wish to Heaven that I had never started upon this journey!" I burst out impulsively.

"It was not of your will, Eric," he answered, "but the will of the Norns. They rule us, the wise old women who have woven the human web from all eternity. None can gainsay them. We are but puppets in their hands. Yes, Christian though I am, I know that this thing is true. And I know also that all shall be well with us."

"All well!" I echoed. "Can you restore the dead or give me back the lost loyalty of a friend?"

"Indeed, Eric, did I not warn you from the first against him?" he asked reproachfully. "Was it not clear to every one that he but used you for his own ends, cursing your whim to come here, as he considered it, and thinking only how he could turn everything to his advantage?"

Such was the force of habit that even then some instinct bade me protest against his words. But he went on with a logic that was irrefutable.

"Thus he seemed to me aboard the

ship," he said. "Nay, and I may say this much now: he proposed to me that we take command and sail for Spitzbergen, where freight brings fabulous prices in the late summer.

"And afterward, watching him, I saw how your words had played upon him, so that he planned to oust you and take to himself all benefits that might come, strutting like a peacock before the tent. And did he not falsely plot with the Lady Editha against you?"

I could not answer him.

"There is this, more," said Bjorn deliberately. "On the night of the festival, after the tourney, when his overthrow and your conquest of Harald had made him sick with envy, he plotted with the Danes. Yea, and he was among the band that attacked our men in the banquet-hall, urging them on against you, whom he did not dare assail.

"Furthermore, through the spy, Wolf, he learned of your journey to the Trolls' city, for Wolf must have overheard you when you told me of your plans. Fortunate indeed was the impulse which brought Sweyn and me to find you."

"And that was the cause of your indifference when I spoke of Ralph as dead?" I asked.

He patted my arm in his fraternal way.

"That was the cause," he said. "How could we have told you that he was living, and a traitor, when you would not have believed us?"

"I've been blind, Bjorn," I said. "And I want to atone for it. Would that my death could have saved the life of one of those who died!"

"That, too, was of the Norns," he answered. "Be comforted, for the end is not yet; and, though you and I must part, both of us shall attain that which we most desire."

Poor comfort to me then! The strangeness of his words meant nothing to me at the time. I relapsed into silence, and we lay there side by side until a gleam of dawn began to straggle through the little window.

Presently there came a click of the lock, and I started up to see Knut, the fool, enter alone, carrying milk and bread.

He set it down beside us, and urged us to eat, chattering and licking his lips meanwhile. I managed to make some sort of a meal, but the half-witted prison-keeper, as he evidently was, was the last man that I could have borne.

When we had finished eating he took the empty bowls, and suddenly his face assumed an expression of intense seriousness.

"What think you of me, Lord Eric?" he asked.

"God be with thee, Knut!" I answered in the old Danish fashion, as one says in such cases.

"Yet, my lord, for all your wisdom, you are wrong," he replied. "Twenty years agone, at the time of the great massacre, they took my father and my brothers and slew them, and placed their heads on poles above the walls, with those of many others. But I was of tenderer years than my five brothers, and when they looked at me they hesitated. Thereupon, my brain never having been overstrong, and seeing death before me, it came to me to feign to be a fool such as God protects.

"So, chattering before them, I won their hearts; and ever since, fearing death beyond all things, I have continued to act in this manner until it has become my nature.

"Rarely indeed do I remember the wisdom that I learned from my father. Yet it is better to be a fool and live and tell the truth, than a wise man and lie and yet meet death from the sword."

He turned such a scrutinizing glance upon me that I saw he was at least deeper than he pretended.

"Listen, my lords," he went on, speaking now more earnestly again. "Through all my folly one thing has ever been with me—to protect my princess, for whose sake I endured the winds and the heaving waters.

"Hitherto, when she was of two natures, and diverse ones, I wavered, not knowing which to serve. But since the Jarl Ralph brought her hither against her will she has had but the one. And whereas once she loved him by day and hated him by night, now she hates him always.

"So much have I learned by listening,

while they thought me but a fool. When he arrived with her, King Harald made him a jarl, and promised him half a province, gold, and his choice of any bride in Rangarok.

"But he loves the Lady Editha, and will abandon everything for her—yea, my lords, for her he plans treachery against King Harald.

"Last night she threatened to kill herself with the dagger that I had given her at her bidding, if he approached her. And, in fear of this and of Harald, he went away. But later he came back, joyful, and told her that by morning you, my Lord Eric, would be in his power.

"And he proposed this: either she should become his bride when he has overthrown Harald, and you should be left alive and given a free passage through the ice fairway; or you shall be hurled to death from the highest point in Rangarok.

"She wept when he said that, but she never hesitated, my lord. She pledged herself to wed him, if he would swear by the relic of the Rood, which lies beneath the altar in the chapel, that he would keep his word. So it goes, my Lord Eric."

"And Harald knows that we are captives here?"

"Truly, my lord. And having beaten back the Anglians, who are but indifferent fighters unless their laws are threatened or their beer taken away, he drinks deep in the palace above and swears revenge upon his enemies."

"And why have you told us this, Knut?" asked Bjorn.

"This," answered the fool, "is my message to my lord here from the Lady Editha. And furthermore, my lord, she bids me say that whether Ralph be her husband, or whether another fate befall her, her thoughts will ever be of you."

The key sounded in the lock again, and instantly the mask of folly came back over the shrewd fool's face. He leered and chattered at us, watching Ralph Wiston, as he entered, out of the corner of his eye.

Ralph had put off his armor, and now wore a silken gown embroidered with leopards; on one arm was a gold bracelet, the insignia of his new rank.

He was accompanied by two armed guards, with Danish swords, and strode forward peremptorily into the cell.

"Stand up! I have something to say to you!" he began with an affectation of command that hardly concealed his evident uneasiness.

"Speak with Bjorn!" I retorted. "He, at least, was never your friend."

He glared at me, fury and shame seeming to struggle in him.

"So you were my friend?" he asked. "You thought that you had bought my friendship with your miserable money? I tell you I hated you after you forced your first five dollars upon me! And every loan only made me hate you the more. And you held this as a club over me, to bring me here, to use me as a tool in your fantastic schemes and become ruler here. Would common flesh and blood stand for that, Eric Silverstein?"

"It was you—" I began, and then broke off and shrugged my shoulders. After all, what was the use?

"And, to be chosen in place of me, you used this madman here to trick and humble me at the tournament," he went on. "Damn you, with your rotten hundred-dollar checks, you *Shylock!*"

It was a revelation to me how the memory of those obligations seemed to have rankled.

"And you were playing me false with Editha," he went on, spitting his words almost into my face. "I was to marry her! I was the butt of your schemes, eh? When I learned that she had saved you from Harald's vengeance on the night of the banquet, at which I had planned your murder –"

"You damned traitor!" I cried, thinking of how I had mourned for him.

He struck me across the face, and stood glaring at me in unutterable hate, as if he could hardly keep from slaying me there and then. The guards stared in amazement at the scene, straining their ears to understand the, to them, incomprehensible and yet vaguely familiar language.

"Then," he cried, "I resolved to inflict on you a punishment that should free me from the memories of your cursed money

and your dirty schemes! I learned where you had gone. The plan to have you torn by the horses was the result of a moment's inspiration; and it failed

"I don't know why you should have been lucky enough to get away, but I tell you this, Eric Silverstein: you may thank your fortunate stars that there is one passion in the human breast stronger than hatred. It is love

"You got away, and you can go free after all. I'm going to stoop to bargain with you. Editha pleaded for your lives I've nothing against this hulking clown."

I swallowed hard under his insults and the blow, but made no attempt to reply. In fact, it was then that I first began to realize that Ralph Wiston was mad. And pity began to supplant anger in me.

"You shall leave Rangarok," he resumed in a more moderate manner. "But Heaven pity you if you cross my path again! I'm going to develop this country, and go back to America and form a company to exploit it. You'll be there. Don't let me hear of you, or—

"Well," he went on, "Editha has agreed to marry me as soon as I have disposed of the old drunkard. And you are to be my wedding gift to her

"That's what I've come for—to ask whether you'll swear to accept my terms, leave Rangarok and this country, and try no tricks."

"If that is your compact," I answered, "I must see Editha and learn it from her own lips."

"You shall see her. That's part of the agreement. You shall see her now," he answered, and made a sign to one of the guards.

The door opened, and in the faint morning light I saw Editha, dressed in white, standing before me.

She raised her head and looked at Ralph with an effort.

"I must speak to Eric alone," she said quietly.

He scowled and hesitated, bit his lip, and then went out with the swordsmen. Bjorn made as if to follow them, but she made him a gesture to remain

So he went to the little window, and, turning his back, stood looking up at the day.

I never thought of Bjorn. I clasped her in my arms.

"What is this bargain, Editha?" I cried. "You have bartered yourself for me—for my worthless life?"

"Your life is dearer to me than my own happiness," she answered with a sob, letting her face fall against my shoulder. "It was an evil day we met. An evil day for you, Eric, my love."

"The one day of my life," I answered. "The beginning of my life, Editha. If I go and leave you to him, the shame of it will never pass from me. But for your sake I would not hesitate. But if I refuse the bargain, what will happen to you?"

"If you reject it, Eric, he will still take me, willing or unwilling. It is a gift, not a bargain. I have no doubt that he will overcome Harald, and indeed I know not which of them I fear the more, though I hate Ralph more.

"Already a plot is afoot to unite Danes and Anglians under one ruler. Harald's day is done.

"Many have long been dissatisfied with his rule, and he brought back little plunder from his expedition to the outer isles, and many were killed.

"Whether Ralph win or Harald win, therefore, matters but little. One thing is sure, and that is that, try as he may, Sweyn can never conquer Rangarok. Already, they say, his beaten army is deserting him.

"So you must go, knowing that my love will follow you across the ice and over the black water, to that far off home of yours in the strange Anglian land ruled by the witan"

"Then, since your fate must be the same, whether I go or stay, I stay, Editha," I answered. "My life is nothing to me now, except for you, for the memory of those who died yesterday, betrayed to him, makes death seem the one choice that I would make if I lost you."

She clasped my hands in hers and looked at me with intense solemnity.

"Be it death, then," she answered. "For you and me, Eric, my lord."

Somehow at that moment the simple compact seemed to us both the most natural thing in the world. We had hardly come to it when Ralph, whom I had heard fuming impatiently without, entered with the two guards.

"Well, you've come to an understanding, eh?" he sneered.

Editha went up to him and stood confronting him, neither timid nor scornful, still under the influence of our compact, I think, which seemed to us a light out of the darkness.

"Yes, we have reached an understanding," she replied. "And we refuse—I to become your wife; Eric to go. Deal with us as pleaseth you."

He staggered back, glaring from one of us to the other. Then, leaping forward, he struck me a second blow that swept me from my feet.

I fell, my head striking the stone wall of the cell. That was all I remembered.

## CHAPTER XXI

### HARALD REGAINS HIS THRONE.

AFTER that I was faintly conscious of a succession of nights and days within a dungeon. I knew that Bjorn tended me; I felt the food between my lips; but I was only partly conscious for what seemed an immeasurable time.

Really it was something like two weeks that my illness lasted. It was less the concussion of the fall than a fever brought about by the culmination of my experiences and hardships.

Then came the morning when I awakened, conscious once more, but weak as a child, to find Bjorn on his knees beside me, tugging at my arm.

"Harken, Eric!" he began. "You can hear and understand me now, for the crisis of the fever is past, and I must acquaint you with what is happening. It is two weeks since your illness began."

My memories of the past began to surge along the channels of my brain. I groaned and turned my head away. Bjorn waited patiently until I was ready to listen to him.

"Sweyn has attacked Rangarok again," he said. "This I have learned from Knut. Again his forces have been beaten back from the walls; nevertheless, his engines have made a breach, and if division come among the Danes he may profit by it.

"This day King Harald is formally wedded to the Princess Editha, and we, as captives, are to be present at the ceremony. I go in chains, in a few minutes, but at Editha's plea, and because of your sickness, you are to be spared that insult

"Ralph, the traitor, has been plotting meanwhile, and something is afoot, some plot by which he hopes to overthrow Harald this noon. There will be fighting, and it is of this that I was thinking when I spoke of Sweyn; for news of this has been conveyed to him through the medium of a trusted messenger—Knut, the fool.

"In my visions I have ever seen an auspicious ending to our troubles. Yet I do not rely on these, knowing how the wishes of the dreamer creep into and color them. But in the confusion there may be a chance for your safety and Editha's. That is what you must understand. Watch, therefore, and remember that there are many Anglians among the nobles who will side with you if events be propitious."

I smiled and clasped his hand.

"I thank you a thousand times, my friend," I answered him. "But how can I play any part in these affairs, who am hardly able to move my hand?"

For answer he took from his coat a tiny vial.

"This, Eric, is the gift of the Lady Editha," he answered, "conveyed to me through Knut, our jailer. She has heard day by day the reports of your condition, and has awaited the passing of the crisis.

"Now that has come, and this vial contains a secret remedy, which restores strength to the drinker—not for a time, as drugs do, but in full measure and permanently. Drink it, Eric, and hastily, before the jailers come!"

He held it out to me. It was composed of blackish glass, crusted with calcareous deposits; and, knowing that there was no glass in Rangarok, I knew that it must be of immeasurable antiquity.

It was hermetically fused, the tapering neck being obviously designed to be pinched off with the fingers. I broke it, and a faint odor of something like bitter almonds came to my nostrils.

I hesitated for a moment, and then, seeing Bjorn's anxiety, tilted the vial against my lips and swallowed the spoonful or so of the contents.

It was insipid, sweetish, and for a minute or two I felt no results from it.

Then a warm glow began to pervade my limbs. I felt my strength returning. I raised my arms and was astonished to find how readily they responded to my will. I got up doubtfully, stood on my feet, and found myself still comparatively weak, but not as a man who had passed through a critical illness.

"Thank God!" said Bjorn fervently. "It is a drug brought to this land by Editha's ancestors, Knut told me, and acquired by them from the Moslem. Nothing but our desperate situation would have induced me to accept Knut's word as to its potency. And now, Eric, I hear the jailers coming. They are to take me first, to fit my chains in the armory. It may be we shall not meet again until our destiny is fulfilled. God be with you, my friend and brother!"

There were tears in his eyes, and this was almost the first sign of emotion that I had ever seen in Sweyn. It was then for the first time that I realized the depths of his controlled nature. And afterward I found myself wondering what strength of will, what secret aim, and what tenacity had brought him to Rangarok. I was to know later.

The cell door opened just as, at Bjorn's urging, I had thrown myself down on the rushes, feigning my illness. Two jailers entered and took Bjorn away.

I was alone for the first time since our capture.

When the jailers were gone I paced the cell, feeling my strength momentarily returning. I was consumed with a fever of anxiety and dread for Bjorn and Editha; and my mind, which had not reacted to the drug with the speed of my physical frame, was in a turmoil of doubt and surmises.

What was Ralph planning, and what did it portend for the woman I loved? It was perhaps an hour after Bjorn's departure that the guards came for me. I had the wisdom to assume weakness, and moved slowly between them out of the cell, and up a flight of stone stairs—another, and through a distant door I saw Rangarok, ablaze with sunlight.

From the banquet-hall I heard the sound of many voices. I was led in, to find it packed to suffocation with Danes and Anglians.

It was now the council hall; for the long tables had been removed, and, at the end near that which I entered, Harald sat on a carved throne embossed with silver, under a canopy of silk. A second throne, on his right hand, was empty.

The thrones were placed on a raised dais, and round them stood a dozen armored swordsmen, Harald's body-guard. About him were clustered the Danish and Anglian nobles, among whom I perceived Ralph, dressed in his jarl's attire, and lolling very near to Harald.

Farther away I saw Bjorn, standing with his wrists linked by huge fetters of iron. His legs were similarly bound, and a great wave of disgust and shame came over me.

All about the dais, cramming the hall, was gathered the multitude, leaving a narrow lane in their center, guarded by pikemen. At the far end, through the open door, I saw a greater crowd, extending across the fields as far as the base of Odin's temple.

I had expected my entrance to make some stir, but, except for a ripple of passing interest among the mob, and a few taunting remarks from those about me, none noticed me as I was placed on the side of the hall opposite Bjorn. I tried to catch his eyes, but he did not look at me.

Nor did Ralph, who moved uneasily from foot to foot, his head bent down, as if he was studying and pondering; his lips were compressed, but once he raised his head and exchanged glances with some of the nobles near him

Suddenly there came a hoarse murmur from without; it swelled into a distant cheer, growing louder and deeper until it

was taken up within the hall itself. All eyes were turned toward the door; and up the entrance, preceded by a score of swordsmen and attended by a dozen maids in white, came Editha.

She, too, was dressed in white, as when I had seen her last, but there was a circlet of gold upon her head and gold bracelets on her wrists. She moved slowly up toward the dais, while the crowds that filled the place pressed hard against the guards, shouting and cheering her, in tones so like those of our own populace that again a sense of the unreality of it all came over me with bewildering force.

Up the hall she moved, her eyes looking from right to left; and now she had seen me, and, though I could detect no movement of her lips, I could read the message in her eyes, and knew that our compact remained unbroken.

Then she had looked at Ralph, and, whatever had passed between them after that blow he dealt me, he could not face her now. He shifted still more uncomfortably, glancing over her and about her as she hesitated for an instant.

But the blazing scorn upon her face was patent to every one. And the cheering stopped, as a sense of some imminent catastrophe seemed to take hold of the audience, and even Harald on his throne leaned forward and looked at Ralph curiously and then at the girl.

The halt was hardly more than a moment's intermission, Editha advanced, curtsied to Harald and stood gravely before him, while her maidens grouped themselves behind her at the foot of the dais.

And I wondered whether our compact included Harald, and whether Editha would take her place beside him. But she remained where she was standing, and now I perceived that this of itself signified nothing, but was a part of the ceremony

All was intently silent now, save a low muttering from one corner. Looking across the heads of the people, I saw old Theobald, the mock king, telling his beads

Then from among the retinue of the king old Asgeld stepped forward, in his hands a heavy iron crown. He stood before Harald and placed it on his head.

"Hail, Harald, King of the Danes and Anglians, mighty lord of great Rangarok!" he chanted. "Thus I crown thee again, according to our Danish custom, with the iron crown made from the steel of conquered foemen. As none could face thee in fair battle, so none can wrest thy crown away, till flesh and blood break steel asunder"

He stood back, and suddenly Harald turned toward me and cried in bitter mockery·

"Hail, Eric the Stranger! Hail, my lord and conqueror of the lists, who by thy devilish arts hast overthrown me!"

And he stood up, the iron crown awry on his head, a great bulk of a man, glaring at me out of his cold, blue eyes.

"Thinkest that thou, with thy might, unaided by witchcraft, canst overcome King Harald?" he roared.

I looked back steadily at him.

"What I have done once I am willing to try again, Harald, usurper!" I answered.

His glare was like a tiger's. And in truth it was a desperate thing to have said. I saw the bulging eyes of the nobles round him. I saw the swordsmen lay their hands to their hilts, as if waiting to cut me down when Harald should speak.

The Danish king's face was red with fury. Harald stared at me; and gradually I saw a look of surprise come upon his face and soften it.

Then he sat down in his throne and began to roar and bellow with laughter.

"Stand back, my nobles!" he shouted. "Stand back and make way for this valiant man! Come hither, Eric! Come, let me have words with the only man who has ever beaten Harald, whether by strength or trick. Had it been that comrade of yours, I should have marveled less."

The nobles round him moved slowly and unwillingly away. As one or two lingered the king seemed to become infuriated. Leaping from his throne, he seized an effeminate youth who was within arm's reach of him, and, lifting him on high, hurled him into the midst of the guards, where he lay stunned.

There was a hurried clearing of the dais.

Only Editha and her maidens remained, and even they were out of hearing of a low conversation.

I stood before the king, looking steadily at him. He continued to scan my face, and the look in his eyes was almost wistful, as if he were dwelling upon long-forgotten things.

"Thinkest thyself to be the peer of Harald?" he asked me gravely.

"In strength?" I asked. "In skill?"

"In those things—yea, and in cunning and love and statecraft and leadership? Thinkest thou that thou couldst rule this turbulent realm?"

"In none of these am I your equal, Harald, Danish king," I answered. "Yet in all these am I willing to match myself against you."

"Eric," he said, after a pause, now speaking in a voice so low that even Editha could not have heard, "thou art the boldest and yet the timidest man whom I have ever known. Are there others like thee in thine own country?"

"Many," I answered, "better than myself, O king."

"By Odin," he said, "I cannot understand thee! For, among us Danes, when a man hath done great deeds he vaunts of them and boasts, both out of natural desire and to affright others.

"But thou hast the skill of a warrior and the heart of one, and yet thinkest thyself as nothing. Methinks it would be a pity that thou, who hast dared cross the black water and found the fairway of the ice, shouldst die at Asgeld's hands."

This was the first inkling that I had of the fate that had been allotted to me.

"Where was thy birthplace?" Harald asked.

He nodded when I told him; but I did not think that he knew where America was, or of any part of the world outside his own outer island, from which, I imagined, he had sailed to become the lord of Rangarok.

He bent toward me and spoke in a still lower voice.

"My heart hath gone out toward thee, O Eric," he said, "and why this is I know not, unless—"

Whatever he was going to say, he checked himself.

"Usually," he went on, "I like a man who hath a tongue as well as an arm; and truly, when a man comes near to beating me, I hate him with an exceeding hate. Thou hast broken my pride, Eric, and yet I love thee. And so I would fain save thee from that which awaits thee."

I heard the low buzz of astonishment in the hall. I could see the nobles clustering together about Ralph, whispering.

"Perhaps," he said, "it is because thou art a true man, and hast been betrayed by a traitor, such as I hate. And, if I show them kindness, it is not for long. Hark, now! It is in my mind to make thee my faithful counselor. And if no son is born to me and the Lady Editha, whom I espouse, I would even choose thee to be my successor, to give the knowledge of the Byzantines unto my people, and teach them the cunning of the ships that move, as we are told, against wind and tide, vomiting black smoke.

"And mark me, O Eric, what Harald promises, that he fulfils!

"For many years I have lived here in Rangarok, and had my fill of battle and love and statecraft and danger, both by war and ice, such as delight any heart.

"And yet I know in my heart that there are other things than these. In a few years more I shall be old, and no longer able to go forth to war and taste the joy of killing. What sayest thou?"

What could I say, except that Editha was paramount in my heart? And to have said this would have provoked a wrath that would have ruined that least chance of freedom with her in which I still dared dwell in my hopes.

But I felt a dawning admiration for the fierce Danish king. He was much of a man, this old warrior of Rangarok.

Simultaneously there came to me the thought that, whatever happened, it would be better that Harald should rule than Ralph. I went closer to Harald.

"O king," I said, "before I answer I would fain speak a word. Having spoken to me of statecraft, why do you trust a traitor who plots against you?"

I saw the flash in his eye. He understood me, and he smiled so craftily that the sudden change from frankness, the very complexity of the man, endeared him to me the more.

"But what sayest thou?" he asked again.

"I cannot," I answered.

"Is death so sweet, then, or is my rule so bitter?"

"It may be," I returned, "that I have other plans and hopes."

My answer amused him vastly. He flung back his head and roared again.

"Truly, O Eric," he spluttered, "that dream is vain. And hard will it be to save thee from old Asgeld; yet, from my love for thee I shall attempt this, knowing that at the last thou wilt choose obeisance to me rather than death. Thinkest thou that Sweyn, twice beaten and broken, may still take Rangarok and save thee?"

I did not answer him, and, after gazing at me for a moment, he made a sudden gesture with his arm, indicating that the conference was ended.

I went back among the guards, but the nobles did not return to the dais. They were whispering together and watching Harald with furtive looks. And now the sense of brooding tragedy seemed to fill the whole hall and hold everybody in suspense.

Suddenly Harald sprang from his throne again.

"Well, I have talked with Eric the Stranger, the would-be king," he roared in a quick change to scorn. "How of thee, Bjorn, the strong man, the stranger's servant? Hast thou thought that thou and he, with your wiles, could pull from his throne, Harald the Deerfooted, whose crown no man could wrest away, nor shall, till flesh and blood break steel asunder?"

I looked at Bjorn, and saw that the old trance had come upon him. He heard and yet he did not hear, but seemed to answer as if Harald's words had come from some interior source.

"Aye, lord!" he answered softly, as if speaking to another. "Aye—flesh and blood can conquer steel; and verily, O king, thy rule is done, and nevermore shall Harald the Deerfooted be lord in Rangarok. Behold!"

Suddenly he bent his huge bulk into an arc. There was a convulsion of every muscle; then, with a clash, the ends of the iron chains that bound his arms and legs struck the floor on each side of him. He stood facing Harald, free!

The hall grew still as death. There was not the least movement anywhere.

## CHAPTER XXII

### RALPH SEIZES THE THRONE.

THEN I saw Ralph and his men edging toward the dais. And I think it was my warning cry that first broke the intense silence.

Suddenly Ralph leaped forward, with a dozen others, knives in hand, and flung themselves upon the Danish king. Taken by surprise, Harald had hardly turned toward them when they were upon him, stabbing at him viciously in a score of places.

Yet even in this mêlée I noticed that Ralph lurked in the background, egging on the others, but himself avoiding the long, flail-like sweep of Harald's arms.

For, though he had no sword, Harald sprang from their grasp with the lithe dexterity that had given him his name. And the would-be murderers recoiled as they felt the knives turn in their hands.

Under his silken robes the old fox wore his armor of steel mesh.

And then began an amazing contest. Harald, alone, with nothing but his fists, was fighting a score, shielding his face from their weapons, receiving no wound, and hurling man after man, stunned, into the assembly hall.

Well planned it had been, for, before his guards could recover from their surprise and rally to his assistance, they had been ringed round by a knot of the conspirators, who drew short poniards from beneath their cloaks and engaged them viciously in overwhelming numbers.

In the great hall arose a wild stampede. A few of Theobald's retainers formed a living wall about Editha and her maidens, and held them against the shelter of the wall,

fighting a passage for them toward the door by which I had come.

But it was locked, and they could only hammer hard upon it, and then, helpless to do anything, watch the combat between Harald and Ralph's followers.

It could not last long. Strong though the king was, the odds against him were too great. They dodged under his thrashing arms, and pulled him down like hounds about a stag. He was still fighting furiously, but vainly.

I saw him being bound, and all at once, as if disdaining to struggle longer, Harald lay still. Meanwhile, and evidently by a prearrangement, the entrance doors had been closed. Ralph's men were herding the crowd back into their places.

Gradually a dreadful hush settled down within the hall. I saw everything as in the crystal of a dream: the great king, breathing hard as he lay helplessly upon the platform, his guards, dead or disarmed and prisoners near by; the frightened girls, with Editha among them, calm amid it all, and looking toward me; Bjorn, still standing amid the tumult like a new Samson, with his broken shackles; lastly the cowering populace, and Ralph's swordsmen, their breastplates gleaming under the torn silk of their concealing robes.

And then, as all eyes turned toward Ralph, he stooped and picked up the iron crown that had fallen from Harald's head, placed it upon his own, and seated himself in the king's throne.

At the act, whether because of fear or of that reasonless revulsion to which a mob is liable I know not, a roar went up:

"Hail to our king! Hail, Ralph the Anglian, Lord of Anglian Rangarok!"

The hall echoed and reechoed with the cries. Even the disarmed guards cheered and shouted. Those on the dais seemed to go mad with their exuberance; yet I think it was more the idea for which Ralph stood —that of two united races—than Ralph himself that kindled their enthusiasm.

For Dane and Anglian had lived together so long that hardly a man there had not blood of both races in his veins.

Ralph looked toward Harald

"Raise him!" he said curtly

They propped the great Dane on his feet, and he stood like an oak before him.

"By right of conquest I claim this land and city," said Ralph. "Dane, what hast thou to say?"

The face of Harald swelled with his passion, but he answered never a word.

"This is a fair land of thine, Harald the Dane," taunted the new ruler. "Methinks that in thy forays thou hast traveled too much to have known it as it is. Otherwise thou couldst not have left Rangarok so often and for so long."

All this in modern English, which, though only I understood, seemed to convey something of its meaning to Harald at least, for he scowled and glared at his supplanter, but answered nothing.

"Now that thou hast more leisure, thou shalt see more of thy country, Harald," continued Ralph. "And thou shalt meditate how fair a land it is, and how fair are its maidens, such as she whom thou didst plan to snatch from me."

And here I might digress to say that, stilted though the language was, it was a fair equivalent of the Danish rendering, and appeared to have been unconsciously adopted by the speaker.

Ralph nodded to four of his men, who came forward and, taking the ends of the ropes in their hands, began to drag Harald away. He went with them, however, offering no resistance.

Straight down the hall they moved, toward the entrance, and there, the doors having been unlocked again, a band of swordsmen fell into column with them and marched out into the sunlight

As Harald passed down the hall the crowd was silent, though one or two hissed and spat at him; but from outside there came a sudden outcry that seemed pregnant with grief for Harald's fall.

Then Ralph was speaking again, but now, to my surprise, in a bastard Anglian which was readily understood. He must have picked up the tongue during his three weeks in Rangarok. And, remembering his genius for languages at college, I was not greatly surprised; for between Anglian and English, except for the pronunciation, there is no great difference.

"Be it known to you, my people," he said, "that, in taking possession of this land, it is my plan to unite Danes and Anglians under one rule. Wherefore I have cast out Harald, the usurper, and shall restore your own king, Theobald, to his honors, to reign jointly with me. Let him come forward."

With ashen face and trembling lips old Theobald arose from his corner and approached the dais. It struck me then that the old man must have been so habituated to violence that he had come to regard such scenes as part of his normal life.

Ralph stood up, with that courtesy and ease which I had so loved; even then his act sent a thrill of sad remembrance to my heart. He took the old man by the hand and gently sat him down in the throne beside him.

And now the cry broke out:

"Long live Ralph and Theobald, kings and lords of Rangarok!"

Ralph smiled. His vanity had overcome his uneasiness. Things were going smoothly beyond his hopes.

"Come hither, O Asgeld!" he said. "And thou, Lord Abbot of Rangarok!"

As if they had rehearsed this ceremony Heaven knows whether they had or no old Asgeld went forward and stood before the throne; and from Theobald's corner, where a number of the monks were seated, the old abbot also advanced until he and Asgeld were side by side.

"Art thou willing that the two faiths shall continue to be held together in Rangarok?" asked Ralph of Asgeld.

"Aye, my lord king," spluttered the holy Asgeld.

I thought he spoke a little unwillingly, and as if with a secret understanding.

"And thou, lord abbot?"

"We seek not to oppress, but to bring others to the true faith by force of holy living and prayers," answered the abbot in a trembling voice.

"Then," said Ralph, "let it be known that henceforth all who are of the old faith shall be held liable to thee, Asgeld, for any apostasy.

"And likewise with the Christians, my lord abbot. If any turn from thy faith, let him suffer the extreme penalty of the law, unless permission has been sought and obtained."

He looked toward the nobles.

"Let this be my first law," he said, "in order that henceforth no quarrels arise, but that each man and woman in Rangarok be duly registered according to his belief."

"We ratify this law, O king!" cried the assembly.

I was watching him closely. Some deviltry was in his mind—I had no doubt of that. But I could not fathom what his purpose was.

"Now be it known to you," continued Ralph, "that it is my intention to further unite your peoples, to take in marriage Editha, King Theobald's daughter. Let her step here, therefore, and be betrothed to me in accordance with Danish and Anglian ceremony."

Editha came forward from among her maidens. She did not look at me. Dressed all in white, bearing herself royally, but without the least defiance or pride, she approached the dais, curtsying low to Ralph.

"Editha, art thou willing to become my bride and rule Rangarok with me?" he asked.

"I am not willing, my lord," she answered.

And my heart was like a fleet steed, pounding for very joy of freedom.

I saw Ralph's face turn red.

He stood up, facing her, while the whole assembly grew very still.

"Why not?" he demanded.

"I do not love thee, my lord," she answered in a low voice. "And know," she went on more loudly, "that my intention is fixed and cannot be changed."

Ralph smiled, as if he had expected this and had been prepared for it. But there was something deeper than the surface courtesy of the next words; I waited for it.

"Truly," he said, "it is not often that a king sues in vain. But, since Rangarok is now free, and no maiden shall be forced into a marriage against her will, be it known to you people that the Lady Editha shall be free to withdraw from our court, with all her honors, and live where

she will, retaining the rank and rights of a princess of the blood."

"That may not be!" shouted a voice among the audience; and I saw the traitor Wolf leap forward with upraised arms. "Hear me, O king!" he shouted.

"Speak, Wolf," said Ralph. "There is none who may not claim audience of me."

"I bind thee, then, by the law that thou hast made, O king," panted the man. "For all know that the Lady Editha hath been of the Christian faith since childhood, in spite of the madness that came daily upon her, when she wandered among the Trolls and worshiped at Odin's shrine.

"That was in madness, and counts for nothing. Well, my lord, since her return to Rangarok she hath knelt daily before the shrine of Loki, in the fire-temple yonder."

And at last I saw the meaning of Ralph's scheme, and its beginning and the end he had in purpose.

"Moreover," Wolf continued, "being now sane, as all men know, she still consorteth with Trolls, and engageth in devilish devices, my lord, such as the Trolls use. And it is rumored abroad that she hath sold her soul to the Troll queen, Haggudra, who hath given her in return power and prosperity till death.

"Therefore I denounce her as an apostate from her own faith, and as a sorceress, and demand that she be burned in Loki's fire, according to the law that hath just been promulgated, O king!"

(To be concluded NEXT WEEK.)

# PROMOTED TO ENGINEER.

LYDIA M. DUNHAM O'NEIL.

THE Teddy bear sits forlorn and sad,
With his wee brown paws in his eyes;
Jack-in-the-box, with the bouncing ball,
On the floor forgotten lies.
The Casper dog in the corner stands,
And his bark no more we hear,
For Little Boy Blue is promoted now—
Promoted to engineer.

With fife and drum and sword of tin
He goes no more to the wars,
For with his birthday came a string
Of beautiful railroad cars;
With yards of track, and an engine fine,
With a whistle echoing clear,
And Little Boy Blue was promoted then—
Promoted to engineer

In vain his hobby-horse waits the sting
Of a genuine cowboy quirt;
On a nail in the closet hangs unworn
A flaming fireman's shirt;
Little Boy Blue forgot them all
When the call of the rail came clear;
When he woke one morn to find himself
Promoted to engineer.

# WHEN BIG SCAR SAW RED.

BY HENRY LEVERAGE.

**Big Scar Went Forth On His Usual Business, but Found a Nobler Cause and Served Therein.**

AS blue as the Karpathians, the Berkshire Hills rimmed the valley at the close of a summer's day. As straight as a beggar can spit the white pike stretched north and south—the flowing road of a people at peace with themselves and the world.

At the side of the pike, beyond a bridge that arched a mill-stream and hard by a mile-post with the figure "3" deep graven into its gray stone, stood a clump of sugar-maples with a patch of sheep-cropped grass upon the middle of which was pitched the tent of a gipsy band.

Back of the tent, close to a fence of criss-crossed rails, stood a dilapidated wagon—covered at the sides—and a grazing horse whose ribs seemed the framework of a mangy membrane of canary-color.

This nag raised its head now and then, turned its neck slowly, then resumed browsing with its great yellow teeth chopping the scanty herbage in a listless manner.

The bulk of a man emerged from the tent as an auto passed, stood breathing the fine dust-particles, then strode to the line where road and grass met. He shaded his eyes with a cunning, close-lidded squint, turned and searched the pike's surface to the converging perspective where farm-houses reared and a town's smoke blurred in the blue of the hills.

"He's long coming," the man said with a certain heaviness of speech. "He's been gone three hours—wonder if th' bulls have pinched him again."

The one word of underworld argot hardly fitted the man's make-up. He was a gipsy leader from all appearances.

A faded red and yellow handkerchief bound his short-cropped hair. The skin of his face was browned by the sun or stained with walnut. His nose loomed through the wreck of a giant scar which extended from the lobe of his right ear, across a strong chin and down to a distended jugular vein.

His mouth was heavy, lipped with a pout. His eyes, alone, might have warned a close student of faces. They were steel-blue and close-set. They held the gimlet-glint seen in the eyes of a man who does not know fear

"Big Scar" had taken a certain pride in his make-up. It had been the brain-child of slow thought. For this reason it was thorough. No constable in the world would suspect him.

No operative of one or both agencies that protected the banks would see in the nomad gipsy caravan a reason for and an explanation of sundry well-executed safe robberies.

Ten years of "stir" life—ten summers and ten winters of arrogant prison-guards and sly-eyed stool-pigeons—had taught Big Scar his lesson. He possessed no imagination save the slow one of discarding failures.

The gipsy call had always been in him. It blossomed out now as the one, sure alibi for being on earth without working—save at night when all honest men were wrapped in slumber.

Again the yegg studied the road in the direction of the village. His eyes narrowed to pin-points. He wheeled with an oath.

His stride toward the wagon was aggressive. He snatched a curtain at the back of this, thrust his head within, and snarled:

"Come out! Time to cook up! Get some wood an' get that pot of mulligan boiling! Brindle 'll be here soon!"

A smothered cry was followed by a saucy laugh. The sides of the caravan swayed like the flies of a sage-brush theater. A girl bounded out, raised her arms, then curtsied before the waiting form of Big Scar.

"I wasn't sleepin', papa," she confessed "I was readin' a beautiful story in a beautiful book."

"Get that pot boilin'," he commanded sullenly. "You shouldn't be readin' trash. That's what happened to the wife—that's why she ran off with—Heaven help him if I find him!"

The girl dashed her wild hair from her freckled forehead. She sprang upward and wrapped her arms about the man's neck. She clung to him with her legs.

"Get down, you brat!" he snarled half-heartily. "Get—down! You'll find plenty o' chuck in th' box. There's that piece of meat I bought at Holdbridge—it ain't touched yet."

The girl slowly let go her hold. She stood a pensive moment, with her finger to her lower lip, then she turned with a swish of her tattered skirt and tiptoed across the grass to the tent.

He watched her. His eyes were not the eyes of a father. They were the eyes of one who looked upon a servant or an inefficient tool.

The Gipsy, as he called her, was little Charley Laurie's daughter, and Charley Laurie had been for years in the graveyard upon the hill above Sing Sing—known to the elect as "Gallery Twenty-five."

"Cute brat," he throated, as he watched her bare feet below the side of the tent. "Mighty cute kid. What a hellion she'll be when she grows up—what a swell gun-moll she'd make.

"Too bad she ain't mine—like she's been brought up to think. It would break her heart to know her real dad's buried in a stir graveyard."

In the make-up of Big Scar there was little of sentiment. His great hands were scarred and gnarled from tough combats with tougher safes. He had learned the business of yegg-work during the days of the Chicago Drainage Canal.

Before that time he had served as a gay-cat with a Toledo mob of "box-men," whose specialty was "puffing a box" with black powder, in the manner of the Australian and English cracksmen.

This method had given way to "souping" with nitro-glycerin, which in turn died out with the coming of the modern "can-opener" and the electric drill.

The age was one of efficient bank protection—of telegraph and finger prints—of well-arranged rogues' galleries where a felon could be named in a few minutes by a cross-index cabinet.

Big Scar knew the chances he took, knew the game could not last long. He contented himself with minor post-offices and summer-stickers—as stamps were called. In a way, he was losing his nerve.

The ten years of prison life had left its marks. He was planning to turn a light trick or two, journey to Chicago and settle down for the rest of his days.

A shadow crossed his face as he advanced to the edge of the road, stooped, and squinted in the direction of the town. Brindle Dick was long overdue

Brindle had taken a thrashing and then had gone on into the village for certain information Big Scar needed for the coming job. This he had planned for the night or the early morning.

He stood erect as the last of the sun's rays lifted from the white road. A whistle sounded from the railroad beyond the river. A freight-train was pulling by. Big Scar could see the long line of gondola cars and the little red caboose. He climbed to a rock to secure a better view. An uncouth figure thrust a frowzy head from one of the cars. A body followed. Brindle Dick swung to the bumper, leaned with one hand holding on, then let go and dropped to the gravel alongside the road-bed.

He appeared, forcing his way through the underbrush at the side of the track. He came slowly across the meadow, reached one hand on the fence, then catching sight of the grim features of Big Scar, he ducked and crawled underneath

Big Scar waited.

"Well," he growled, "you've been long a comin'."

Brindle Dick wiped his mouth with the back of a tattered sleeve. He hesitated, glanced cunningly toward the shadow of the girl in the tent, then whispered:

"Had to dodge th' soldiers, pop. They're on th' bridge. Wouldn't let me cross without a pass."

"Did you see th' goopher?"

"Yep! Went in an' changed a sawbuck. No deck above—no lighthouse, at night. Burg's dead after twelve.

"Th' box is a white-faced Hall. No bug-wires. Campson's General Store -you told me—the pig-iron dump."

"That's right—sure there's no bug?"

"Sure. Went all around—no wires. I got a drawin', pop."

Big Scar snatched the soiled and crumpled paper the boy drew from his pocket. The old yegg turned, sniffed the certain signs that the girl was busy, then studied the crude diagram intently.

"This," the boy explained—"this is th' front—th' main stem. This"—he traced with his finger—"is th' alley. Window there.

"Goopher, there where you see th' cross. One light in store. Guess it's out, after midnight."

"No guessin' goes! Wot's this?"

"That's the town jug, an' that's th' church. No harness bulls—just easy, pop."

Big Scar crammed the drawing into the bosom of his shirt.

"Dig in an' help th' girl with th' eats. Beat it! I ain't goin' to stand for no nonsense from you."

Brindle Dick swung on one heel and slouched toward the tent. His eyes wandered over toward the railroad. They swept the haze that marked the location of the town and the river.

They dropped in thought. He had located the prospect, as he had been ordered. A few hundred dollars—perhaps less, would be theirs by morning.

Big Scar would take the lion's share—he always did. He was a hard man to suit at any time. Brindle Dick wondered how it would all end. In prison, no doubt. Cracking safes was a State's prison offense in any State.

He swung open the flap of the tent, with a reckless hand. The girl was stooping over the fire at the other end. Her legs were bare. Her skirt had been torn and mended till it was now mostly patches. The shawl she wore furnished the gipsy touch.

"Hello," said Brindle Dick, brushing his straw-colored hair back from his forehead. "Hello, Gipsy. How's th' eats?"

The Gipsy wheeled with a startled cry. Her head tossed backward as she recognized Brindle Dick.

"Nice time for you to be comin'. It's all ready. Papa's been waitin' an' waitin'."

"Let him wait."

Brindle Dick had made certain of not being overheard as he made the declaration.

The Gipsy furrowed her young brows.

"Bring me anythin'?" she asked.

"Guess."

The Gipsy eyed Brindle Dick's hands as they dug in his side pockets, appeared, closed up, then came out to her. One, she saw, was larger than the other.

"Guess," he repeated, with a quick jerk of his head toward Big Scar, who was still standing by the side of the road.

The girl placed the tips of her fingers on Brindle Dick's fists. She repeated the formula: "Eeney, meeny, miney, mo," then laughed in silvery tones.

"A ribbon?" she hazarded, between trills

"Nope! Keep a guessin'."

"Hair-pins?"

"N-o!"

"Candy?"

"Better than that!"

"I give—up."

Brindle Dick allowed one grimy fist to open. In it was a crushed silk flag. He seized it by the ends and held it before her puzzled face.

"For you," he said. "For you to wave at people. Ain't th' country at war?"

"Yes! Oh, you're a dandy! I'll put it on th' tent."

The Gipsy clapped her hands, and caught the crumpled ball as Brindle Dick tossed it to her. She turned then with a thoughtful droop of her chin, sank to her bare knees and peered into the pot.

"'Most ready," she said. "Tell papa to come."

Brindle Dick backed, then swung and glided to the side of the old yegg.

"Eats is ready," he announced.

Big Scar dropped his head between his great shoulders.

"Things look quiet," he said as he followed Brindle Dick. "Ain't been many automobiles passing. Guess you're right—th' burg's dead after dark. Th' dog won't be out till two or three."

Brindle Dick searched the heavens for the moon. That luminary is always called the "dog" in Vagabondia.

The meal was consumed in silence and without benefit of forks. Big Scar finished first, strode to the wagon, and drew out a jug of corn whiskey. This he upended by circling it over his shoulder, resting it on the broad of his right arm, and gulping twice.

His humor was almost human, as he returned and entered the tent.

"Get th' cards," he ordered. "Get th' deck an' read my fortune, Gipsy. See if there is any bad men in my path to-night."

The girl glanced at Brindle Dick. A tiny frown rippled her white forehead. Her eyes darkened with the intensity of thought as she crept through the gloom and returned with a well-thumbed deck.

Again she glanced at Brindle Dick. He lay sprawled half in and half out of the tent. He was watching Big Scar's attempts to fill a pipe with the makings of two cigarette butts. The old yegg had drunk enough to floor a navvy. His breath seemed to fill the tent.

The girl dropped her eyes from Dick's freckled face. She shuffled the deck with an overhand motion. She waited patiently then.

"Deal th' pasteboards," growled Big Scar. "Spread 'em out, Gipsy."

Gipsy began an old fortune-telling arrangement of the cards wherein she could read them two ways.

She began picking up the piles, redealing, then moving them over the grass floor of the tent.

"I see trouble—" she began.

"Wot kind?"

The yegg leaned over.

"First, trouble with a dark man no, two dark men. They will be in your way. I see death. Th' end is all right, though."

"Death!" repeated Big Scar with a throaty laugh. "Tell 'em again, girl. Tell Dick's—he believes in anythin' you say—I don't! I ain't had no use for cards since th' wife ran away—she could tell fortunes—she could."

Big Scar pressed the heel of the tobacco deep within the pipe's bowl with his thumb, rose to his knees, then to his full height.

"Tell Dick's," he repeated. "I'll be gone for a spell. You kip (go to sleep) early, girl. Dick an' me got business."

The girl waited till the heavy footfalls of the yegg had sounded going down the white pike. She snatched up the cards then, thrust them in her bosom, and clutched Dick's hands.

"Where you goin'?" she demanded.

Brindle Dick listened, then jerked his thumb over his shoulder.

"Town," he said.

"To rob?"

"N-o."

"Sure?"

The girl had thrust her eager face close to Brindle Dick.

"Are you sure? Ain't he draggin' you again? Where's it goin' to end?"

"Big house—maybe."

"What's th' big house?"

"Stir—State prison."

"An' you're goin'—to-night?"

"This is th' last. He said it would be th' last trick. It's a swell touch. No bugs—no lighthouse—nothin' but walk away with th' swag."

Brindle Dick's voice grew eager. He, too, leaned forward.

"Just this once, kid. I promise—this is th' last. You just jump in th' wagon an' kip when you hear him comin'.

"We won't be gone later than two. We'll mooch along then, to-morrow, an' you'll have ribbons an' dresses an' all kinds of rags—sure, you will."

The girl's gray eyes welled with tears. She clutched the tattered waist where the cards were. Her head bowed.

Dick, who had reached out his hand, felt a burning spatter upon his knuckles.

He drew his fist away, and gazed at it curiously.

"Can it!" he growled. "Can th' weeps!"

The girl lowered her head still further. Her slender shoulders rose and fell in choking sobs. Brindle Dick pressed back his sleeve and eyed a long, livid bruise.

It had not been there in the morning. Big Scar had gripped him there with fingers of steel. He had hurled him half across the road.

The thought of running away with the girl had occurred to Brindle Dick at that time. He had put it away through fear and a latent sense of loyalty Now, it cropped up again. He eyed the girl, then lowered his sleeve.

She had not seen the marks made by the brute she called her father. She had never been struck by him, but then Dick knew the big yegg thought the world of the girl

"He'll be back soon," Dick suggested.

The Gipsy raised her brows, daubed her long lashes with her fists, then bent her head.

"Hear him?" asked Dick.

"No—but I'm going to bed. I'm going to try an' sleep, Dick. Promise me this is th' last time. Promise me you will live square—after to-night.

"I don't want ribbons and rags. I want to see dad working honest. I want to see a home. I want to go to school. I want to do what other girls do, Dick."

"Aw, th' road's all right! I don't like th' heavy work—or th' gay-catting—but th' rest is fine. Where'd we be if we wasn't here—in some Cottage Grove Avenue flat with th' neighbors all chinnin' up th' air-shaft, an' you or me rushin' th' duck for a pint at Regan's. This is th' life—if it wasn't for th' heavy work."

The girl rose and stood holding the edge of the tent. Her thin hands and tiny wrists held Brindle Dick's light blue eyes. He toyed with the down upon his upper lip.

"Good night," he said

"Good night," answered the girl

She was gone as he blinked. He heard the wagon-springs squeak, then a low sobbing. It died note by note, as he waited, his chin in the palm of his grimy hand. Silence followed.

A slight chill crept down with the mists of the night. Brindle Dick shivered, crawled under the side of the tent and reappeared with an armful of bark and wood.

This he tossed on the fire, half-closed the inner flap of the tent, and stretched himself before the crackling blaze with his elbows upon the dirt floor, his fingers pressing the sides of his face in vacant reverie.

An hour—two hours, passed, and still he sat, in the same position. A train roared by, then sounded the hollow rumble of the bridge at the river. He threw more bark on the fire, leaned back, and fell into a half doze.

A firm step awoke him. He sprang up. Big Scar stood in the opening of the tent. The yegg's powder-stained hand was held out in slow warning

"Time to mooch," he whispered. "Girl's kippin', eh?"

Brindle Dick nodded.

"Come on then! We'll get th' tools at that smithy—down th' stem a piece."

"Wot about th' can-opener, pop?"

Big Scar jerked his head savagely.

"I got it! It's planted! Don't think I'd have it around, do you?"

Brindle Dick kicked a mound of dirt over the embers of the fire, dragged his cap down over his yellow, uncut hair, and followed the blurred form of Big Scar, out to the pike, then along the grass fringe toward the sleeping village.

The yegg had the step of the born prowler. He chose the high spots of the half-pathway with unerring judgment. He paused as they reached the first of the slope where the table-land dipped through the gloom down to the river.

Brindle Dick crept alongside. He waited as Big Scar raised himself to a full height and searched the countryside. No sound broke the stillness of the night.

The stars twinkled in yellow glory. One red planet was dipping toward the west. It seemed an eye of fire.

"Come on!" said Big Scar with a husky cough. "Follow me! There's th' smithy's shack over there—mark th' broken window. I'll boost you in through that."

They climbed the fence, struck across

dewy grass-land, and came, like two shadows, upon a structure of pine and shingles by the side of a river road.

Big Scar motioned toward the window.

"Put on your gloves!" he commanded shrewdly. "Don't touch anythin' with your fingers—many a book's been lagged that way."

Brindle Dick fished a crumpled ball of leather from his rear pocket. He wiggled his fingers into the gloves. He listened then, darting side glances in all directions.

"Go on!" snarled Big Scar. "Wot y'u waitin' for—a rumble?"

Brindle Dick pressed the sash open, peered inside, then threw one knee over the sill. The rest of his body followed.

He dropped inside. Big Scar backed, searched the mists with bent head, then crept up to the open window.

The point of a short crowbar was extended from the blackness within the shack. The yegg took this, examined it, then laid it down upon the turf.

"A heavy wolloper," he whispered. "Get a short-handled one."

Brindle Dick groped with his hands, tested the collection, then thrust out a sledge.

"Anythin' more?" he asked, leaning on the sill.

"Another rod. Get a thick one. We might need it."

A shorter crowbar than the first came out. Big Scar sized it up with the shrewd eye of a connoisseur.

"Come on!" he hissed. "Close th' window. Pick up th' wolloper. I'll take these."

The yegg thrust the two crowbars under his left arm, hunched his head down between his shoulders and started off in the direction of the river. Brindle Dick climbed out, closed the window, picked up the sledge, and followed.

Their path now led through marsh-land and stagnant pools. Big Scar never hesitated. He reached the river's edge at a point below an overhead network of girders and lattice-work.

It was the giant, railroad draw-bridge across the river. Beyond it was the village, and the general-store he was going to rob.

A crude, flat-bottomed boat floated half in and half out of the water. Big Scar laid his tools in the bow. He turned, then, and started up the bank.

"Stay there!" he commanded. "I'm goin' for th' rest. Don't move till I get back. Look out for light-houses on th' bridge."

Brindle Dick deposited the sledge in the bottom of the boat, sat down, and eyed the shadowy structure below him. It was the main-line crossing of the railroad.

Soldiers had been upon it during the day. He could see none, now.

The lapping of the waters of the slow-running river lulled him into a doze for the second time that night. He jerked his head erect, bobbed it, then jerked it again.

His eyes refused to stay open. He shivered slightly as twelve slow strokes struck in a church-tower over the dark waters of the river. Again he nodded, then sprang erect.

A heavy arm circled his neck like a striking python. He was pressed over and down in the slime of the river's edge. He struggled vainly. He tried to call, then choked as a palm was laid across his mouth with giant strength.

His eyes opened widely as he saw that it was Big Scar who had attacked him. He caught the suspicion in the yegg's features as they pressed close to him.

"You'd squeal—would you!"

The words were hissed into his crushed ear.

"You'd try to snare your dad, eh?"

Brindle Dick lay quiet. He was no match for the burly yegg. He shook his head and ground it deeper in the slime. A heavy knee pressed upon his chest. His breath was cut off

"Rat! What d' ye mean by puttin' th' *bulls* wise?"

Brindle Dick blinked at the accusation. It was as unjust as it was brutal in manner.

Big Scar drew his gums back from his yellow, tobacco-stained teeth. He jammed down his huge thumb till it was within an inch of Brindle Dick's right eye.

"Squealed—didn't you?" hissed the yegg.

The thumb lowered. Brindle Dick closed

his eyes and struggled A cutting laugh sounded in his ears.

"Get up!" he heard dimly. "Stand up! What's 'em bulls doin' down by th' bridge? Some of your friends, eh?"

Brindle Dick felt the pressure released from his neck and chest. He staggered to his feet. His lips were twisted with fear. They were white and bloodless. His tongue gagged his throat as he tried to answer.

He turned with shaking knees and glanced toward the foot of the giant bridge. For the first time he caught the glow of a fire. It was reflected on the railroad ties above.

"Them's soldiers," he stuttered.

"Soldiers — hell! Them's Pinks or Burns men. Didn't I get a slant at 'em?"

"They weren't there when I rode th' rattler. They weren't there."

"Are you sure?"

"Y-es—pop"

Big Scar rubbed his chin-stubble. He stepped to the higher bank, still keeping his eyes on Brindle Dick. His foot touched a bundle of tools.

He turned then, swiftly, and studied the bridge and its approach. His eyes swung back to Brindle Dick. He lurched down the incline and thrust out the boat till its bow floated clear.

"Get th' can-opener," he snarled. "It's back there. We'll drift across.

"I don't like that fire, though. This is our last touch. I'm gettin' nervous just like little Charley Laurie."

Brindle Dick felt of his throat as he started up the bank. He had bent to lift the bundle of well-wrapped tools when he heard an exclamation from Big Scar.

This was followed by a cry that pierced the night. There sounded a shot, a running of men across the foot walk of the bridge, and then a muffled cry from the further bank. Afterward there was silence.

Brindle Dick crouched and hurried down to the side of Big Scar

The yegg was planted like a giant oak, with both legs extended and a hand shading his eyes as he peered into the night. His lips were closed in a hard, red line

"Kid," he muttered. "Kid, there's been a guy or two croaked up there."

The yegg pointed his arm at the bridge.

"Croaked? Why?"

"Why do they croak guys?"

Brindle Dick could not answer this question.

The yegg narrowed his eyes in speculation. He chuckled as a splash sounded across the river.

"There goes one," he said grimly. "Wait—maybe they'll be more."

Brindle Dick was puzzled. Big Scar possessed the answer to a riddle which gripped him with its mystery.

"I don't see, pop—" he began, then hesitated.

"It's none of our funeral, Dick. It's not in our line. We better be clearin' out we'll take th' goopher an' beat it. There's goin' to be hell a poppin' here pretty soon."

Brindle Dick furrowed his brows. He leaned and cupped his right hand behind his ear. He had heard a slight sound which increased to a grinding shriek of metal upon metal

"Th' bridge is openin'!" he exclaimed.

"Sure," grunted Big Scar. "If you wait it 'll open some more."

Brindle Dick searched the river to the north, then to the south. No boat or barge was in sight.

He turned a puzzled face to the dark features of Big Scar. He waited as the yegg moistened his lips.

"Kid," began Big Scar. "Dick," he rasped. "Dick, them guys I thought was Pinks was Germans—German spies! They sapped th' two soldiers on th' bridge. Now they're openin' it.

"I thought they'd blow it up. But they're openin' it hear 'em? Like as not somethin' comin' down from Canada to-night. Like as not they've been layin' for this job for a long time."

"But I don't see—"

"Shet up!"

Brindle Dick scratched the back of his muddy head. His nails filled with slime and sand. He eyed them reflectively. His brows worked up and down.

An idea was creeping through the fog of his brain. The truth about the bridge was coming to him with each metallic rasp from the opposite shore.

"It ain't been opened in years!" he exclaimed. "They're springin' it with jimmies."

"Not so loud. There's some of them down there."

Big Scar thrust his jaw in the direction of the fire's glow. The yegg's eyes gleamed in the reflected light. They hardened as he cast a calculating glance across the river, then at the boat.

"Come—on," he ordered, half-heartedly.

Brindle Dick stepped forward.

The yegg reached a huge foot into the boat, tested his weight, then glanced down the river. His eyes were almost closed.

"Kid," he said turning and withdrawing his foot. "Kid, I've a mind to start somethin'."

Brindle Dick reached out and touched the giant yegg's arm.

"What, pop?" he asked.

"Somethin' what we ought to do. Them's Germans. They've croaked th' soldiers.

"They're springin' th' bridge for no good reason. They got a launch down there fer a get-away. I'd like to lamm into 'em!"

"There's six or seven—"

Big Scar took the challenge with a stride like a hyena. He clutched up the larger of the crowbars Brindle Dick had stolen from the smithy. He jerked his jaw sidewise and showed his teeth as he snarled:

"Follow me! Keep right after me! I'm goin' to fall on them squareheads an' bust 'em up a whole lot!"

Brindle Dick felt some of the berserker rage which had risen within Big Scar. He, too, slid through the slime of the river's bank, reached over the edge of the boat, and seized a crowbar.

The burly yegg was charging in the direction of the bridge and the fire as Brindle Dick floundered to firm soil. He lowered his head, seized the bar with both hands and dashed along the fringe of green that rimmed the river.

A warning shout in German sounded as Big Scar hurdled a fringe of brush, loomed like some leaping tiger, then descended in the midst of a small, almost hidden campfire.

The yegg struck without warning. The long bar circled through the air, swished, then crashed down between the thick neck and raised shoulder of a German. A second blow followed the first.

The yegg, bellowing in argot, held the bar like a flail. He recovered his balance, lurched to one side, and jabbed the blunt point of the tool into the startled features of the first German's companion.

The man went down across the scattered embers, threw out his hands and lay still with blood jetting from a torn vein in his neck.

Big Scar rose to his full height. He shaded his eyes and searched the surrounding brush. A slender launch was tied to the bank.

Its half-deck was polished mahogany. Its trimmings were plated.

"Smash that!" he roared to Brindle Dick. "Smash it to matches— then come on!"

Brindle Dick stepped over the bodies of the two Germans, parted the brush, and jabbed at the launch's sheathing with the sharp point of his crowbar. A flare of crimson leaped from the bridge, overhead. A bullet whined by his ear and spattered the mud. Brindle Dick ducked, glanced upward, then raised his arm over his head.

A finger was on a trigger to send him into eternity when Big Scar scrambled over the edge of the abutment, and charged along the ties. He leaped across the intervening space, shouting as he raised his crowbar. The German who had been guarding the end of the bridge hesitated for one fatal second, and that second was his last on earth.

Big Scar brought the rod of iron down full upon the capped head. He followed the blow through. He rose with the German in his arms. Brindle Dick caught a blurred impression of a body hurtling through the air.

He heard the loud splash out in the dark waters of the river, then a burly form was running across the wide-spaced ties—an avenging shadow between the girder-work and the crisscross lattices.

Brindle Dick crawled up the sloping bank and followed. He came to a place where the two rail-ends missed each other by inches. It was where the bridge opened.

A blurred mass of shadows blocked the other end of the bridge. A warning cry had risen. It rolled throughout the iron of the structure. The swinging span trembled, then swung back a fraction of an inch. A pinch-bar had let go.

The Germans had thrown down their tools and fled. One had leaped over the side of the bridge. Brindle Dick seized a cross-girder and peered down-stream. A head was bobbing in the water.

It disappeared, then reappeared. A shout sounded from the dark bank. A hand reached out for the swimmer. He waded ashore, turned, then dashed for the cover of a brush thicket.

Big Scar stood like a colossus as Brindle Dick crept forward to the place where the spies had been at work. It was the end of the span at the village side of the river. Tools and discarded clothing lay scattered about, left by the Germans in their hurried flight.

Brindle Dick dropped the point of his crowbar till it rested on the tie. He leaned upon it, breathing heavily. His eyes raised and fixed upon Big Scar's broad back.

The yegg was listening, with his jaw thrust forward, with his fingers coiling and uncoiling about the rod of iron he held like a pikestaff. A growl sounded from deep down within the bulk of him. His teeth clamped and ground.

"Kid," he rasped. "Kid, there's a train a comin'."

Brindle Dick dropped to the track and pressed his ear to the cold rail. He distinctly heard the far-off rumble of steel upon steel. He rose under the shadowing bulk of the giant yegg

"Yep!" he said

"It's a comin' kid. It's a bunch of cushions."

"Cushions," to Brindle Dick, meant passenger-coaches.

"She'll stop at the water-tank," he offered.

"No, she'd whistle if she was—an' she ain't whistled."

Brindle Dick scratched the back of his head. He felt the yegg's broad palm upon his chest.

"Back a piece!" snapped Big Scar. "Right there! Get th' point in, an' swing your weight! Swing when I tells you to.

"Now—all together! We got to close th' rails! We got to do it, kid!"

Brindle Dick felt the bar bend in his hands. He jerked it out and turned it. Big Scar had secured an old safe-breaker's hold. He inched on this as if a million in gold was to be his reward.

He drove the point deeper with the leverage of a perfect wedge. He grunted with satisfaction as the span trembled and partly closed.

Brindle Dick glanced over the yegg's straining shoulders. A glow was around the bend. This glow brightened

A roar sounded. The rails beneath his feet danced and sang with a metallic whine.

Suddenly there burst upon them the white spot-light of an electric arc. It flickered along the rails, rose, and illuminated the entire bridge-structure.

Brindle Dick bent with his bar, held it far over, then felt the point slip. He sprang to the lattice-work with a shout of warning to Big Scar.

The yegg swung his weight back and forth. He rested his chin on his shoulder. He glared at the onrushing locomotive like a stag at bay. He bent, hunched his arms, strained and twisted his face into a fighting snarl

The rail-ends met. The bar slipped. The yegg fell headlong across the rail, then rolled as a racking roar descended upon them

Brindle Dick dropped to the length of his arms, clutched the tie overhead, and held on with his fingers slipping. The train seemed endless. He counted the coaches, as they clicked overhead. The end came at last, with his long finger-nails dug deep into the wood.

He jerked his body, thrust one elbow through the opening, secured a hold, and worked himself upward. His face appeared above the rails.

Two green lights marked the rear end of the disappearing train. He twisted his neck. A second glow illuminated the track in the direction of the village. A second

section was following the first. A whistle sounded

Slowly Brindle Dick rose up through the ties. He fell face downward with one leg thrust through, then raised himself.

Big Scar was lying alongside the track. His shoulder seemed to touch the outer rail. His face was twisted underneath his body. His legs were dangling over the river.

Brindle Dick called hoarsely. The yegg did not answer.

Brindle Dick tottered across the track. He reached for the girder above Big Scar as the locomotive leaped upon the bridge. He lifted himself and swung outward. The hurtling train struck the joined rails, clanked at each truck, but passed over safely. Brindle Dick twisted his neck and peered under the iron.

He saw a blurred series of yellow dashes each dotted with human heads. Faces peered out through the windows. They were soldiers clad in olive drab. They had come from some border cantonment.

The last coach roared from out of the bridge. It rounded a high embankment, then vanished with a blur of green and red lights. Brindle Dick hesitated.

He squinted in the direction of the village. No glow showed there. He swung, then dropped to the end of the ties below him. He crept under the cross-girders and sank down upon the form of Big Scar.

"Pop!" he sobbed. "Pop—are you croaked?"

The big yegg groaned. Brindle Dick ran his hand underneath a weltering chin. He drew it out and trembled at the sight of blood.

"Pop," he repeated. "Pop— answer me, pop."

A shoulder lifted, then dropped. The yegg twisted his head from beneath his body, laid his face upon the rail, then moaned. Brindle Dick pressed back the matted hair. He leaned and ran both hands under Big Scar's neck.

"Come, pop," he said

Slowly Big Scar gathered himself together. He sprawled forward on hands and knees, raised, poised his body, then stood swaying between two ties.

His blood-clotted eyes swung from bridge-end to bridge-end. They rested, finally, upon the eager face of Brindle Dick. A hand went out in understanding.

"Help me walk kid," said Big Scar. "Let me lean on you a bit. I reckon the cow-ketcher must o' hit me"

Brindle Dick half led, half carried the injured yegg. He stepped from tie to tie with one foot always in front of Big Scar's halting stride. They swayed, paused, then went on toward the further bank.

A drip sounded upon the clean-cut cross-beams. It was the blood that poured from the big yegg's neck.

He halted Brindle Dick as they reached the end of the draw.

"Hol' on, kid," he whispered. "Hol' on a minute- got a rag?"

Brindle Dick fished a tattered handkerchief from his pocket. It had been a gipsy turban.

Big Scar flapped it out with one hand, lifted the other from Brindle Dick's shoulder, and stood swaying as he wrapped the crude bandage about his neck and brought it to a knot under his chin.

"That's better," he said. "Lead th' way, kid. Me eyes is goin' blind."

"Hurt much?" Brindle Dick asked as he felt the yegg's weight increase in mounting to the meadow by the smithy.

"Naw."

Brindle Dick steeled himself as the weight became greater. He staggered on with his head down. Big Scar's hand pressed him almost to his knees. He groaned slightly.

"Much further, kid?" throated the yegg.

"Just a piece," Brindle Dick managed to gasp. "This way, pop."

The trail led out to the white pike. Brindle Dick chose the center of this. He dragged his feet with Big Scar resting both hands on his shoulder like leaden weights of despair.

They reached the sheltered clearing under the sugar-maples. The dew dripped there from new-budded leaves.

Brindle Dick braced his feet, then wound an arm about Big Scar. They swayed, with hot blood pattering the grass.

The yegg coughed, then wiped the froth

from his lips. A sound came from the caravan. A spring squeaked as a face was framed between the canvas flaps of the rear. The Gipsy, round-eyed and wakeful, peered out at them like a disturbed bird.

Big Scar leaned forward. He reached out one hand and tottered toward the wagon.

His foot caught in a tent-rope. He fell forward with a low moan—first to his knees, then flat upon the grass.

Brindle Dick glided to the caravan. He whispered the news into the Gipsy's ear. Her head disappeared. The canvas at the side of the caravan bulged as she half-dressed. She appeared, sprang to the grass, and darted across the clearing toward Big Scar.

Her bare arms wound under the yegg's neck. She lifted his head with tender fingers and laid it on her lap. She cooed and stroked his unshaven face.

Brindle Dick hesitated, then started hitching the nag to the wagon. He gathered together the camp trappings, pulled down the tent, bundled all within his arms and staggered to the caravan.

Big Scar rose to his knees, rested his arm on the Gipsy's shoulder, then towered to his feet. Brindle Dick assisted him on the way to the wagon.

The yegg climbed in, sprawled out across the loose bedding, still warm from the Gipsy's body, then stared upward with thankful eyes.

Brindle Dick knotted the flaps shut, motioned to the Gipsy, and sprang to the seat. He reached back, felt among the straw, and lifted the jug of corn whisky.

The Gipsy held a tin cup. Big Scar took the offering, gulped, smacked his lips and turned to a restful position. His eyes fastened on the two before him.

"Was them soldiers?" he asked.

"Yep, pop," answered Brindle Dick.

The yegg furrowed his brows. His hand crept to his throat and felt of the bandage. His fingers opened and closed slowly.

"I'm glad," he said. "I'm satisfied we didn't crack th' safe in th' burg. Wouldn't o' been right, would it, Dick?"

Brindle Dick nodded vigorously. He picked up the lines and drew back sharply. The nag started across the clearing. The caravan squeaked as it got under way.

A bump followed as they reached the ditch and then the white surface of the pike.

Brindle Dick drew upon the right line. "Git up!"

The Gipsy reached into the bosom of her dress, drew out a tiny bundle, flapped it open, and fastened it overhead, where the canopy bowed forward. The silk flag dropped, fluttered, then whipped in the morning breeze. Its stars matched the white light-points of the night in their glory.

Brindle Dick drew the girl close up to him. He jerked the lines and slapped the nag's bony haunches.

"Git up'" he repeated. "Git up—we're goin' home, to Chicago!"

# ORIGIN OF THE WORD "ENGINE."

THE Latin word ingenium, which signifies heart, mind, abilities, or genius, was originally applied to any mechanical device or contrivance of an ingenious or complicated character. In the course of time the word became Anglicized into "engine," and those who operated mechanical appliances were called "engineers." Numerous machines have got their names from a corruption or abbreviation of the word engine, as, for instance, gin, jinny, *et cetera;* but of late years the name has been applied almost exclusively to prime movers. "Locomotive," which is now used to denote locomotive engine, was first applied in the sense now generally used through George Stephenson naming one of his first engines "locomotion." The word was expressive and convenient, and soon came into popular use. Some slight deviations from the word were common in early days. The Norris Locomotive Works, when first established, announced that they intended building locomotives.

# BOTH ENDS AND THE MIDDLE.

BY FREDERICK ORIN BARTLETT.

**In New York the Natives Cry for "Small-Town Stuff," While Villagers Pine for Manhattan's Monstrosities.**

THERE are those who are awed by the fact that New York has a population of five million or more. It is as though they felt these to be the odds against them. But Christopher Blaisdell was not one of those. If he had been, he would not have been able to establish there, with his partner, Lacroix, the business of making French rolls which was fast bringing him a bank-surplus.

In the first place, he was not afraid. Lank, clear-eyed, and with big wrist-bones, he had brought to New York the poise and self-confidence he had acquired at Eaton Center, where men still fear only God, and of late years are taking chances even with Him.

In the second place, coming from outside, he was able to study the great metropolis impartially as one does a map. There is nothing in the world so blandly democratic as a map. Neither birth nor wealth, neither creed nor politics, is indicated on a map. Kingdoms, empires, republics are there all one.

If ever men are born truly free and equal it is on a map. Pride of girth there may be, but even this is only roughly recognized in the brief statement, "Size of type indicates the relative importance of places." And the difference in the size of type is not always as impressive as it should be.

The more Blaisdell studied the map, the more he saw and heard, the more convinced he was that the great metropolis below all its noise and confusion and bluster was merely another Eaton Center; that Eaton Center below its quietness and peace was a latent great metropolis

The foreign quarter of the city was only another settlement like that below the tannery-bridge at home, and *vice versa;* the avenue was only another North High Street and, turned about, North High Street was a miniature Fifth Avenue.

Blaisdell, however, was no mere theorist. If he philosophized it was always to some practical end. The apartment-house idea had long appealed to him as a conservative way of investing his savings, and with this in mind, he had actually bought a lot of land at a point in the suburbs where a great many eight-flat apartments had already been erected with every evidence of success. He had even consulted a builder and had an estimate made when an incident occurred which made him reflect.

He was walking down an avenue which, while not the best avenue, runs parallel with it and may safely be called the next best avenue, when, in an antique store, he caught sight of an old kitchen-chair. It was an ordinary wooden chair, painted yellow, of a type he had seen all his life in his home-town of Eaton Center.

Curious to learn what it was doing here in the midst of rare rugs, old silver-plate and brass candelabra, he stepped inside. The proprietor emerged from a corner like a spider.

"I saw an old wooden chair in the window," explained Blaisdell. "Maybe now it came there by mistake."

"Ah," said the proprietor, rubbing his hands together. "A fine piece. Old Colonial in perfect condition. I have a set of six. Let me show them to you."

The man brought one to the light, and Blaisdell examined it. It was in good condition, as the man had stated. No one could dispute the fact that it was a perfectly

good kitchen-chair. The paint was worn a little from the bottom, but that did not matter. The chair was still stout and strong. Blaisdell had some just like it in his own house back home, and so did nearly every one in Eaton Center.

"How much do you ask for the set?" inquired Blaisdell

"I can let you have those for sixty dollars," answered the proprietor without as much as a wink of his eye.

Blaisdell started.

"I don't want to buy," he explained cautiously. "But I might sell because I have some like those at home. What would you give now for a set just as good?"

The proprietor instantly removed the chair.

"I have to make my profit," he answered indifferently. "I'll give you five dollars apiece for all you can bring in like those."

It was evident then to Blaisdell that the value after all was not wholly fictitious. Still, he was curious.

"But they aren't worth that much," he protested. "They are only old wooden chairs."

"I'm not fussy. I'll give you three if five seems too much," returned the proprietor with a trace of irritation to think he had made his original offer so high.

"What I want to know is *why* they are worth five dollars apiece," persisted Blaisdell.

"Because they are worth all you can get and because you can't get 'em here in town," answered the proprietor.

"But you can get new chairs with plush bottoms for less than that," argued Blaisdell. Such chairs were very popular at Eaton Center.

"All you want of 'em," admitted the proprietor, sorry he had wasted so much time. "Guess you're in the wrong store."

"Perhaps," Blaisdell agreed pleasantly. "Thank you just the same."

The rest of the day Blaisdell spent visiting other antique stores. Although he found some variation in prices he learned that these dealers were, on the whole, wonderfully unanimous in agreeing that there was a hearty demand for these old wooden chairs—the demand being based upon the fact that they were not easy to get any more in the city.

As soon as Blaisdell reached Eaton Center that night he made a call upon Mrs. Ezra Chase, who lives on lower High Street.

"You've got some old kitchen-chairs, haven't you?" he inquired.

"Reckon everything I have got is old," replied Mrs. Chase. "I've been at Ezra for ten years to buy me a new set for the sitting-room, but you know how Ezra is. Anything thet was good 'nuff for his mother is good 'nuff fer me."

"How many of 'em have you?" asked Blaisdell

"Dunno. Come out and see."

Blaisdell followed her into the kitchen and counted five chairs. They were just as good as those he had seen in the antique stores

"I'll swap six new ones for them and give a set of red plush for the sitting-room to boot," he offered.

"Land sakes alive, be you crazy?"

"I don't think so," Blaisdell answered soberly.

But Mrs. Chase had her suspicions about that, as every one in Eaton Center had. Even if he had made money once by his craziness the popular verdict was that he'd lose it in the end through the same affliction.

"You can have them, Chris Blaisdell, if you'll give me six new ones to take their place, but I wouldn't feel right in taking no plush set to boot. You can't pick up plush sets in Eaton Center."

"I stand by my offer," said Blaisdell. "I'll send for them to-morrow."

If Blaisdell had dropped the subject at this point it might have led to his becoming merely a dealer in antiques in the great metropolis or a dealer in plush-bottomed chairs in Eaton Center. But he didn't.

As a matter of fact, he wasn't interested either in old yellow chairs or plush-bottomed chairs, except in their relation to the much larger problem as expressed in the significant phrase used by the antique dealer. "You can't get old wooden chairs in the city," or as expressed by Mrs. Chase, "You can't pick up plush sets in Eaton Center." The next day Blaisdell bought in addition to six new kitchen chairs and

a set of plush furniture for Mrs. Chase, a small lot of land for himself, located about a hundred rods from the Knights of Pythias Building.

That same forenoon after he had gone over the routine business of the day with Lacroix, Blaisdell leaned back in his chair and observed casually.

"I'm going to invest some money in real estate, Lacroix. Why don't you come in with me?"

"Real estate?" Lacroix inquired suspiciously. "Bah! These dealers in real estate are such liars."

He lighted a cigarette.

"Take warning from me, Mr. Blaisdell. Once, when I first came over to this country, I bought a piece of land near the seashore."

He puffed at his cigarette once or twice and then waved his hand.

"It was too near the seashore. Twice a day it was at the bottom of the ocean. Bah! They are all liars, those dealers in real estate."

"But what I'm going to do is build," explained Blaisdell. "I've bought a lot in Eaton Center and a lot on the edge of the city here. My scheme is to put up a farmhouse and an apartment-house. I figure we can make some money out of one of them if not both of them."

"It is possible," agreed Lacroix with the air of a man who hints that it is also improbable.

"All right," said Blaisdell as he rose to go out.

Now, one had only to look at Blaisdell to be sure that he was in earnest about this proposition, but the thing that puzzled Lacroix was why his partner looked upon the enterprise as in any way unique. There was nothing original about building apartment-houses or farmhouses either. At the same time, any undertaking that had Blaisdell back of it was not to be ignored.

"What will this cost?" inquired Lacroix.

"I figure I can put up the sort of apartment-house I want for round eight thousand dollars," answered Blaisdell.

"*Sacré!*" exclaimed Lacroix. "It will be nearer eighteen thousand before you're done."

"And the farmhouse for round five thousand. We ought to double our money."

"*Eh bien,*" said Lacroix. "I am with you."

He said it, however, with the air of a man who tosses for luck a louis d'or on a roulette-table. The business was not worthy of Blaisdell. But he made out his check for a one-half interest in the two lots.

From the start, it was clear that even if Blaisdell didn't make any money out of his projects he was bound to have a good deal of amusement. One would have thought he was a young man building for his bride.

He unfolded his blue prints before Lacroix and heartily bored the latter with the details. First he showed the farmhouse—as though such a farmhouse was never built before. Yet when all was said and done it turned out to be nothing more than a story-and-a-half structure painted white and trimmed with green blinds.

A brick path led to the door, and the windows came down close to the ground. The interior was equally simple: a small entry, with a bedroom to the left and a sitting-room to the right. From the latter opened a second bedroom and also the dining-room.

The kitchen was in the rear and there were two more bedrooms up-stairs. Nothing could have been simpler—nothing more commonplace. There were in Eaton Center a hundred such houses, and they had been there for a hundred years. Yet to hear Blaisdell wax eloquent over the beauty and coziness of the structure you would have thought this was something of his own invention. Lacroix listened and yawned.

"You ought to come out and see it," pleaded Blaisdell. "They've got the underpinning in already."

"That is very fine," nodded Lacroix. "But is it that this farmhouse is very different from others in Eaton Center?"

"Don't know as it is," admitted Blaisdell. "But, honest, I wouldn't take today, twice what it's going to cost."

Soon after this, Blaisdell inflicted upon his partner the apartment-house plans, and once again the latter would have yawned—if he had not been so thoroughly astounded.

As with the other plans, nothing could have been simpler or more commonplace.

The specifications called for a four-story building, with four suites either side of the middle. Each consisted of a parlor, a dining-room, three bedrooms, a bath-room, and a kitchenette. There were thousands of them in the great metropolis, and yet to hear Blaisdell talk, you would have thought not another one existed

"We're going to have hot-water heat and running hot and cold water in bath-room and kitchen!" he exclaimed.

"Wonderful!" nodded Lacroix.

"Tell you what—that will take their eye."

"*Certainement.*"

"And we'll have electric-light fixtures in every room."

"*Oui!* That is a good idea. A very good idea."

"And in the rear, Lacroix, we'll have a dumb-waiter connecting with every flat, so that groceries can be sent up on it."

"Yes, that's a good idea, too."

"Then I'm going to have speaking-tubes at the front door, connected with each flat."

Lacroix solemnly rose and placed his hand on his partner's shoulder.

"That's a good idea, too, Mr. Blaisdell. But I'll tell you a better idea; if you would take a vacation of a month—"

"Vacation?" exclaimed Blaisdell.

"A little trip to Paris. You are working too hard."

"Nonsense. Never felt better in my life."

That was the end of this suggestion, but Lacroix, from that day on, made it a point to reach the office an hour earlier than was his custom. Up to this time he had been content to leave the routine business wholly to Blaisdell, but now he made a determined effort to master it

He felt that he owed this not only to himself but to Blaisdell. And yet he found that the latter was never keener in his management than during this period. He made enough extra for both of them during these three months to cover any possible losses on the new venture.

But all any one had to do—Lacroix himself or a mere business acquaintance—was to mention building, and Blaisdell would out with his blue-prints. Lacroix learned to avoid the subject in every possible way.

It was in June that Blaisdell made the announcement one morning.

"All done, Lacroix! Last coat of paint went on yesterday."

"Paint on what?" demanded Lacroix.

"The farmhouse. Thought I'd surprise you."

"Now that is good," answered Lacroix. "And the sooner we can sell, the better."

"Could sell to-morrow," said Blaisdell. "Kind of thought you'd like to look over the place yourself first and give your opinion."

"I'm willing to trust your judgment," declared Lacroix.

"To-morrow is Sunday. I could take you to see the properties and then you could have dinner with me," pleaded Blaisdell.

"*Eh bien,*" submitted Lacroix.

Blaisdell called early the next day—so early that in spite of the bright spring sky Lacroix found himself in no very happy frame of mind. He bundled himself into the back of the machine and tried his best to complete his sleep as they bumped over the rough city streets.

In less than half an hour they stopped—not in Eaton Center, but in the middle of the colony of apartment-houses. Lacroix opened his eyes and stared about him. He was familiar enough with this part of the city — the macadamized streets, electric lights, trim little lawns, the angular houses, with their screened front porches and the evidence of fireplaces ostentatiously displayed by the brick chimney on the outside.

He knew where he was, and yet, facing him, set back from the road, he saw a little old farmhouse approached by a red-brick path. Below the windows early spring flowers were beginning to bloom. An old brass knocker adorned the front door. Standing here in the midst of the other stark houses which never grow old —which, with age become only dilapidated—this new house was the oldest of them all. It stood out like a wild rose in a garden of weeds.

"Heavenly!" exclaimed Lacroix, tumbling from the machine.

Half the neighborhood on their way to church had stopped to exclaim in like manner over this newcomer—as they had been exclaiming for a month. A new building of the usual apartment house type would have passed unnoticed, but this—

"An inspiration!" gasped Lacroix again. "But what is this doing here?"

"Doesn't look bad here, does it?" said Blaisdell.

"It is a poem," Lacroix raved excitedly. "It is a song—like the songs of the birds in spring. But this—it is not from the plans you showed me upon the blue-printing."

"The same," nodded Blaisdell. "It's nothing but a little old Eaton Center farmhouse—"

"Don't tell me that. It is an inspiration. Look at these houses round about it. But how came it here?"

"Come inside," said Blaisdell, "and see for yourself."

He led the way up the brick path and threw open the door. The little entry was papered with a quaint old landscape design—the same design that had for years adorned the houses of Eaton Center. A mirror hung on the wall bearing at the top an odd picture of a very plump young lady in pantalets standing beside a very plump beehive done in red, white, and blue. In the bedroom, on the left, there stood a mahogany four-poster—the wood dark with age. In the other rooms old tables, old chairs, old secretaries looking as though they had stood in these very places for a century. On the floor were mattings of quaint design and rag carpets, of patterns that delighted our grandmothers, added a softening tone to the ensemble. Lacroix paused for breath before he had seen half.

"Beautiful! Wonderful! But you have spent a fortune here?"

Blaisdell shook his head in immediate denial

"Got all these things at home," he answered. "Swapped with the natives of Eaton Center for new stuff. Gave a brass bed for that four-poster. See that bureau with the brass handles?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Swapped a quartered oak piece for that. See those chairs?"

Lacroix nodded. He knew their value. He, too, had become familiar with "antiques" sold at "modern" prices to seekers after the old-time atmosphere.

"Those cost me a plush set and six pine chairs."

"But they must be crazy—those people of Eaton Center!"

"No, it isn't that," answered Blaisdell. "The fact is they don't need that old stuff any more—have no earthly use for it just now."

"Then they have died?"

"They have moved."

"All of them?"

"Eight of them—into our new apartment-house."

"Then that apartment-house—"

"You'll have to come to Eaton Center to see that! It's about the swellest thing in town."

Lacroix couldn't even exclaim. Very deliberately he seated himself upon one of the yellow chairs.

"Every flat is rented," continued Blaisdell. "And, of course, they wanted to start with new furniture. People at home don't have a chance to pick up plush sets and brand new quartered oak every day. And they don't have a chance to get hot-water heat either. Or speaking-tubes. Or dumbwaiters. They've never had 'em in their lives, and so eight of our best families sold out their old stuff and moved in."

"*Sacre!*"

"And so," added Blaisdell, "I've got a chance now to pick up eight pretty good farms in Eaton Center at a bargain. If you want to go in with me—"

"Say nothing more, Mr. Blaisdell," pleaded Lacroix. "All I want to know about your inspirations after this is how much money you will permit me to give you. As for this place here—it cost how much?"

"Round five thousand—including everything."

"I will give you eight thousand for it," said Lacroix promptly.

"I've already been offered ten thousand. I won't sell for less than twelve thousand. You can't pick up an old place like this round the city every day," explained Blaisdell.

# CASE NUMBER 147—RECONSIDERED.

BY H. KEITH TRASK.

**The Original Decision Had Been Right, but There Was Good Reason for Its Reversal.**

Request of Employees: Claim of Engineer Job Bunce for one day's pay account not being used on regularly assigned run out of Lost River, January 21, 1918.

Award: Claim allowed.

OST RIVER is prepared to admit that the deliberations of an august body like a board of arbitration should be confined to fact and not allowed to wander into the realms of fancy. Nevertheless, considering all the angles of the above case, it is unanimously of the opinion that the board has erred on the side of brevity.

Conceding that it would have been irrelevant to print a complete summary of the circumstances leading to a decision, our enginemen—and notably among them Andy Lozier—feel that no harm could accrue had that paragraph been distinguished in some way from its one hundred and fifty-two fellows; say, framed in a tasteful border of four-leaf clovers rampant, or loping jack-rabbits.

Job Bunce burst upon Lost River at a time when the master mechanic was casting longing glances at the male members of the infant class in the district school and wondering how soon it would be possible to draft them into the service, firing.

I am betraying no secrets when I state that Sieveright would have hired Judas Iscariot, Benny Arnold, or any other bad-actor who could prove his ability to pilot an engine through the one hundred and ninety-three miles of involved and unstable landscape that lie between our metropolis and Fort George.

Under such circumstances of stress, Sieveright dropped Job Bunce into the pool. The hit he made was a loud splash of reverse English.

Indeed, the whisper of calumny preceded his first appearance. The stove committee had it from the chief clerk, who had inscribed his name upon our roll of fame, that Job's last prior incarnation had been unwinding kilowatts and juggernauts on a juice-wagon in the electric zone around New York.

Shades of George Stephenson and Matty Baldwin! A juice-wagon!

Sieveright had gone crazy. Lost River's opinion of electric traction—derived chiefly from the one-horse trolley line at Fort George—was low.

Crazy? It was criminal lunacy!

Ours is a man's size division—oversize, we claim—and we cherish a simple pride in its peculiarities. It was cruel and unlawful to turn loose upon us a lightning-bug to whom trouble must be due in large wads. The boys could only pray that it would come quickly, and pass on without involving innocent bystanders in its fatal effects.

Chance and the extra-board ordained that Andy Lozier—recently set up and confidently full of *joie de vivre*—should first encounter Job.

Andy, called for 8 A.M., reached the breakfast-table to find before him a short, pursy, elderly man. There was something about the stranger's self-confident and self-approving bearing as he chatted with the Widow Ellis that inspired Andy with a feeling of vague hostility from the start.

"Shake hands with Mr. Bunce, Mr. Lozier," the widow requested.

"Glad to know you, Mr. Bunce. Hear you're going to be with us," quoth Andy, complying.

"Yes, I come to help Sieveright out, seein' he's so short-handed," Mr. Bunce affirmed, toying with a large, imitation four-leaf clover pendent from his watch-chain.

"I don't doubt you'll be a big help," Andy admitted.

The conversation presently developed the interesting fact that Andy was to have the pleasure of introducing Job to the thorny path. Andy had been called to chaperon a string of tourist cars to Fort George, where they were wanted in a hurry.

It was a labor to fill his soul with bliss at any time; an excursion on which he could give his propensities for fast motion full play, and the pleasures of anticipation were not lessened by the opportunity to show this lightning-juggler some real railroading. He was in a gracious humor as they set forth for the roundhouse.

"They tell me those electric trains are hummers," he suggested by way of opening the conversation.

"Geared for eighty miles an hour, if you let 'em out," Mr. Bunce assented impressively.

"Must be great to yank a string of those varnished cars over one of those four-track, block-signaled boulevards at eighty an hour," Andy mused. "Safe, too. You can sit in a nice, clean cab, all tastefully decorated with brass coffee-grinder handles and fancy bundles of wire.

"We ain't class like that here. We have to get ourselves all nasty and dirty, and sometimes we get hurt. But I sure like to ride fast!"

"Most young runners do," Mr. Bunce agreed, with a swift, inscrutable glance at his companion. "Fast ridin' is all right in its place."

Silence reigned for several hundred yards. Andy, pondering Mr. Bunce, decided that he lacked the red blood that thrills to the call of rapid locomotion. Also he reflected that a trifle of rapid locomotion on this trip would not only entertain Job, but would land Andy in Fort George in time to spend an hour with the lady who sold tickets in the moving-picture palace

He failed to notice a small, long-eared animal that bounded lissomly athwart their right-of-way.

But Mr. Bunce did—and stopped dead in his tracks. Moreover, he faced about immediately and started back toward the widow's.

"Hey, ain't you comin'?" he called over his shoulder.

"What for?" Engineer Lozier demanded, startled out of his trance.

"Didn't you see that rabbit cross our path?" Job demanded. "You surely ain't goin' on in face of that, are you?"

"Am I goin' to lay off for a rabbit?" the stupefied Andy inquired.

"No, not lay off, but you must go back and make a fresh start," Job explained, with genuine concern in his voice. "There isn't any worse bringer of bad luck than to have a rabbit cross your path when you're goin' to work. Come on back."

A loud, hoarse, scornful laugh was Mr. Lozier's only answer as he went his heedless way.

Red-faced and breathing hard, Job reached the roundhouse ten minutes behind Andy, to find Mr. Lozier detailing the rabbit incident to the engine-despatcher and a couple of idle runners. Job bore their joshing calmly, his fingers twisting his four-leaf clover.

"Trouble with you young fellers is that you don't reelize the importance of preeceedent," he stated. "Experience has shown me that rabbits bring bad luck if you don't counteract it.

"It may come soon, or it may come late, but my young freind here is bound to learn the truth. I'm tellin' you, and I know."

It is believed that this was the first time that Job mispronounced the word "precedent" in our midst. And on that occasion his audience scoffed.

Side by each, Andy and Job sought the 2716, to hear Fireman Wig Hollis using words that he had never learned at his mother's knee. Mr. Hollis was convinced that this regrettable old 2716 would have answered nicely for a refrigerator in a hotel, but as a producer of the powerful fog that pulls freight she was a misfit

Job took notice immediately. He opened the fire door, bent down, and squinted within.

"The trouble nowadays is that young

fellers only learn one way to do a thing," he orated. "Now, if I had to jam heat-units into a leaky mill over this pike, I'd treat her case like this!"

He launched into a technical disquisition on the art of firing on the Lost River division that speedily reduced Wig to a state of slack-jawed, dreamy-eyed hypnosis. Andy grabbed his long spout and grease-plug wrench and dodged the flood by starting to oil round.

Presently Mr. Bunce was by his side, watching operations with a coldly critical eye. The scrutiny flurried and irritated the operator.

It indicated as plainly as spoken words that, for some reason, Job did not approve his technique. That initial feeling of hostility grew more defined.

He hurriedly finished up with the right-hand trailer-truck ribs, then, wiping his can, addressed his critic:

"That the way you'd treat *this* case?"

"Not exactly. I always grease the whole pig—you missed two holes in the motion-work on this side," said Mr. Bunce. His voice was even and expressionless; it merely stated the fact, and implied neither criticism nor censure.

Andy favored him with a long stare, then, hating himself for doing it, but hating Job worse, went and looked at the motion-work and found it even so.

After the little red wagon, hitched on behind the tourists, had cleared the yard-limit board, Mr. Lozier widened out on 'em and began to go away from there. And as he went, he dilated upon the uncertainties of life on the Lost River division, adducing a total of illustrative detail calculated to impress this aggravating newcomer.

Mr. Bunce, though uninvited, had seated himself behind Andy, crowding behind Andy, crowding the rightful occupant to the very edge of his box. He listened in silence to Runner Lozier's revelations, and his manner gave no hint of his inward sentiments, but, if anything, suggested boredom.

Several times he displayed such a surprising familiarity with the time-card that Andy suspected that he must have learned it by heart as part of the monumental bluff by which poor, crazy Sieveright had been deluded into hiring him.

Thus they approached Blackfish Bay at an inspiriting fifty-five per hour, about the limit of comfortable riding over the wheels of the 2700 class.

"This here stretch is very bad medicine," Andy declared as the engine swung her pilot into the first leg of the horseshoe that closely hugs the shore. "Since I been around, the track has slid right out from under three different guys without any notice at all."

He eased the speed a trifle, the engine heeling to the bank of the curve. Job, leaning past his shoulder, peered ahead.

"Tolerable mean place," he agreed. "Hadn't you better slow down some more?"

"What for?" Andy grinned back over his shoulder. "We get by here all right plenty of times."

Mr. Bunce expectorated, also over Andy's shoulder.

"Ain't there a permanent time-card slow-order between miles 917 and 923?" he inquired. "Them rules ain't made to be broke, though you young fellers never sees it," he added mildly.

"Say, who's who in this boat?" Andy snapped. But, to his disgust, he found his hand reaching involuntarily for the throttle-latch.

"This here high-daddy stuff is a childish pastime," Job proclaimed. "Speed's all right when you get somethin' by it, but all it can get you here is a thirty-day lay-off."

Andy found himself slowing to the statute limit. He couldn't help it, for he felt those little, beady eyes of Job's boring through the back of his head, and it was precisely as if his conscience was standing off and looking at him. That hostile feeling became further intensified, and desire for revenge began to rack him as a drunkard's thirst.

One thing he had decided. He would show up this pestiferous buttinski for the hollow mockery he really was. As the cleared the end of the slow-order zone, Andy started to travel again, and his antipathy to Job Bunce waxed even as the speed.

This fat electrician from the trolley-line would teach a Lost River man his business. All right!

Consulting his watch, Andy perceived that there was plenty of time to make their meet with No. 4, even in the event of a certain contingency, contemplation of which was sweet to his soul.

For some time past Wig Hollis had been displaying all the symptoms of a man with a big day's work on his hands, but Engineer Lozier had cold-heartedly chosen to ignore the distress of the working classes. Now he rose and indicated his desire that Job should take the throne.

"Show me how they wing 'em along in the electric zone," he requested.

Thereat Wig made murmurs that he took no pains to render inaudible to Mr. Bunce. Job shot Andy a shrewd, quick glance as he slipped placidly into the seat.

If he was perturbed, he concealed it well. As Andy had anticipated, he eased in on the throttle immediately.

"We'll see if we can't help that boy out a little," he remarked, nodding at Wig. Then, trying the water, added:

"No good in ridin' so fast. We'll only have to lay around Pillar Rock, waitin' on No. 4, as it is."

Fireman Hollis straightened up and favored Andy with a look that was eloquent of the sudden revision his opinion of Job was undergoing. Andy, on the left side, glared across the cab. Plain murder was beginning to seem too merciful.

Nevertheless, albeit unwillingly, he was forced to admit to himself that Job could run an engine. The way he took hold was proof that he hadn't learned the business from a correspondence course, either.

But wait!

Moseying easily on their way, they raised two dead trees, far ahead. Those trees stood midway of a tangent. At its end the track curved easily northward. Here lay the joker upon which Andy was counting.

There was nothing in a theoretical knowledge of the time-card to indicate that, beyond that curve, the track did not continue level; no warning to the uninitiated that he would find himself slap up against the three-per-cent hitch of Copper Ledge.

Take it flying or double it, with freight or passenger, is the formula for the ledge.

Mr. Bunce regulated the injector with care. He dropped the reverse lever one notch, then a second.

"We'll ride 'em a little faster now, son," he warned Wig Hollis. By the time he passed the trees he had pulled the cork clear out of the bottle.

For a man who did not like rapid traveling, Mr. Bunce certainly did well. Andy was still hanging on by the arm-rest when Job shut off to ease the 2716 into the passing track at Pillar Rock.

While they were waiting for No. 4, Job addressed him across the cab.

"As I was sayin', speed's all right when you have to get somewhere in particular."

"You must have been overtaken by an uncontrollable desire," Mr. Lozier commented caustically.

Job rested a dreamy eye upon him. Then he cocked his feet upon the boiler-head, bit a fresh portion from his eating-tobacco, and let his gaze wander over the barren landscape, munching reflectively.

"Seein' the world sure does broaden a felier's ideas," he philosophized.

"Copper Ledge doesn't seem like any hill to me nowadays. Yet it ain't changed a mite—except that those two trees were livin' when I quit here in ninety-one."

Once again he flashed Andy a glance from those little eyes.

"I reckon that was before your time.

"One thing I've noticed particularly," he went on, addressing the circumambient atmosphere, "is that young runners are alike the world over. They all have this foolish, high-daddy disease, and they're all likely to form hasty and incorrect conclusions from incomplete information."

Throughout the rest of the trip Andrew Lozier remained silent, pondering the aptness of this truism.

Job's name went on the list immediately under that of Andy Lozier, and, owing to the mutations of our engine-running population, they both rose rapidly in seniority. Nobody had believed that Job would tarry long, but he did. He was too good for Lost River—he said so himself—and public opinion agreed with him.

It was the only point upon which he and it *did* agree. On every other postulate that Mr. Bunce propounded it took a contrary stand.

In short order Job became the village pest. He produced upon grown men the same effect achieved by teacher's pet in Sunday-school. When anybody got into trouble, he was on hand with a full exposition of how it could have been averted. The strongest fled from his advice and post-mortems as from a plague.

However, advice was the only thing he was lavish with, as Bigfoot Jennings, chairman of the adjustment committee, discovered when he applied for assistance of a more substantial nature.

"It ain't that I'd mind lendin' *you* the money, Bigfoot," Job explained regretfully. "I know you'd pay it back. But there's pree-cee-dent to think of.

"If I'd give it to you, there's a lot of young fellers that squander theirs in French Louis's back room would think I should lend to them, too."

In a community of open hands and yawning pockets that would have been enough, but there was worse and more of it. In matters of mileage computation and other rights, Job's pettifogging insistence got him in wrong with the engine-despatchers, Sieveright, and even the superintendent.

The most maddening thing about Job was that experience exhibited him as good as his claims. Pest and curse he might be, but, in its calmer moments Lost River had to admit that he displayed the genuine goods.

When he made a kick, he could quote chapter and verse to prove his contention. He never willingly shaded a rule and sanctimoniously reproved others for their peccadillos, yet he traveled over the road as promptly and with less grief than his detractors.

Let a bumptious, self-conceited man proclaim loudly enough and long enough how good he is, let him back his assertions by performance, and he will eventually be accepted at his own valuation. That was how most of us came to accept Job, albeit we loved him none the more.

Andy Lozier remained frankly hostile. Memory was too green with Andy. He thirsted and yearned to ride Job over the bumps, to prick and utterly reflate the balloon of his self-esteem, and stamp upon the débris.

And he thought his opportunity had come when Dave Roberts had a head-ender with pneumonia and made his last run to the Great Beyond.

All the jobs on the division are in the pool except Nos. 1 to 4, the through passenger trains. These are assigned runs, and were held by a close corporation of six.

From the outset Mr. Bunce had claimed that the fact that he had run an engine on the Lost River turnpike before the advent of any one else now present entitled him to one of those runs.

Instead of being left subject to the vagaries of a pin-headed engine-despatcher, whom he more than suspected of unfair and discriminatory practises, he maintained that he should be jumped to a passenger assignment, with an engine of his own.

The proposed jumpees had never made it unanimous.

With much interest Mr. Bunce read the bulletin announcing that applications for the vacancy in the through-passenger service would be considered in the order of seniority.

"Huh!" said he, "I don't see why Sieveright bulletined that job."

"Belongs to you, I suppose," sneered Bigfoot Jennings.

"Why, of course," Job agreed calmly. "I'll have to go and see about it."

He hurried to the master mechanic's office

"You're the last man who should ask me to establish a bad precedent by disregarding a rule, Job," Sieveright objected, his eyes twinkling. "I have to call for applications, but I'll certainly give your claims the consideration they deserve."

That could only mean that Job would be assigned. He departed, well satisfied of Sieveright's underlying good sense. Early on the decisive morning he hied him to the engine despatcher

"What engine do I get for No. 3 tonight?" he chirruped.

"You don't get any. Andy Lozier gets the 2810," the despatcher answered, grinning

"Lozier!"

Job's face went blank.

"Why, Sieveright promised me that run!"

"Take somethin' for your complaint," the despatcher advised rudely. "Andy's senior to you and he gets it."

"He'll never keep it," Job prophesied. "He's too young. He'll do somethin' foolish. I won't have to wait long for my rights."

It is significant of the regard in which Job's forecasts had come to be held that nobody joshed him about that speech. It seemed safer to wait and see if anything *did* happen to Andy.

The truth of the prophecy proved uncanny. The third time out, Andy took No. 3 ninety minutes late off the Lake division. There is a theoretical speed-limit of forty-five miles an hour for passenger trains, and no man is required to make up time lost somewhere else. If he maintains his running schedule he has done his duty.

But Andy ambitiously went out to retrieve an hour of that lost time. He did it, too, thereby giving his passengers a rough ride and greatly annoying the general manager, who happened to be on the train.

At Fort George the G. M. held No. 3 while he melted a few telegraph-wires.

Bad news travels fast. Lost River knew that Andy had been disrated and chucked back into the pool even before the victim, asleep in Fort George rest-room, had been apprised of his fate. There was expressed much sympathy for Andy's hard luck.

There you had it, quoth Job. If Sieveright had assigned the right man, the G. M. need never have had his philosophic calm disturbed. Less than an hour after the catastrophe he had reminded Sieveright that Job Bunce was now due for his rights

Unquestionably, the run belonged to Job, but there was an indecent quality about his haste to grab it that classed up with robbing a baby's bank, or filching pennies from a blind beggar's cup. Anybody but Job would have waited for notification that he was to step into Andy's shoes.

Something ought to be done. But what?

Job's comfort to Andy was salt in a raw wound, and resulted in a complete severance of diplomatic relations.

"Considerin' that rabbit you laughed at, you got off lucky," Mr. Bunce decreed. "Many a reckless young feller has killed a lot of people and never lived it down.

"Better be a mite cautious yet a while. Bunny might not be done with you."

Except for one sentence, Andy's reply is necessarily deleted.

"I'll bunny you," he promised with his last available breath.

As a passenger-runner, with an engine of his own, Job's cockiness transcended human belief. He drew the 2800, a hog with a bad name, that nobody loved.

But a proposition like that was nuts to him. He nearly drove the roundhouse foreman crazy with his demands, but inside a month he had made a good engine out of a wreck

Having wrought this marvel, he announced that he was going to keep the 2800. It would drain his heart's blood, he said, to contemplate the pollution of his treasure by less expert hands than his own. Lest such a catastrophe might happen, nothing short of total physical disability would have induced him to lay off.

On the days when his turn out came, he kept himself posted on the exact time of No. 3's arrival, and showed up to register, punctual as the standard clock itself. He was taking no risks of being late and seeing a substitute called. It was alleged that he had been seen to weep when turning the 2800 over to a hostler

These days, when they foregathered at the widow's table, Andy formed a habit of watching Job in the manner of a cat contemplating a mouse. It was about this time, too, that the widow detected Andy in the act of raiding boards and wire from her chicken-run which he carried to the back of the wood-lot. The small pen she discovered there so greatly titivated her interest that she took Mr. Bunce to see it.

She held his opinions in high esteem. At the moment Job could offer no explanation save that here was another example of the erratic whims of comparative youth.

On a day—January 21, 1918, to be exact—Andy found himself first out, with the chances good that he would not be called until after the departure of Mr. Bunce with No. 3. This was the concatenation of circumstance that Andy had been awaiting. He held private converse with the engine despatcher. They parted like men well pleased, and Andy went home, while the despatcher hinted to Bigfoot Jennings and others that it might be amusing to stick around.

Andy passed Job in the front hall, struggling into his overcoat with the widow's assistance. He went to his room, and later stole down the back stairs.

Later yet, but still prior to Job's departure, he might have been seen headed toward town from the wood-lot with some object concealed under his coat.

Mr. Bunce fared forth, wrapped in the gathering dusk, his overcoat, and the contemplation of delightful possibilities. Mrs. Ellis had a snug little place, and she was neither too young nor too old to be a congenial partner to a man who has reached the age when it is well to settle down.

Unconsciously, his brisk pace slackened somewhat, and he fell behind the orderly schedule of his walk. He had nearly reached the outskirts of town when two small animals burst out of the underbrush, streaked across the road in front of him, and disappeared. He glared after them.

"Sure as blazes, they were rabbits," he breathed. Instinctively, he turned his face toward home, then wavered, watch in hand.

If he went back, he would be late at the roundhouse. Beads of perspiration dewed his brow. Suppose they should think he wasn't coming and call somebody else?

Those things might not have been rabbits. But they had been rabbits—unmistakably. And look what had happened to Andy Lozier!

Job took no chances and went back.

Fifteen odd minutes late, he stormed around the corner of the roundhouse, and the turntable came in view.

His heart gave a sick flop. The 2800 was on the table, swinging majestically to the out-bound lead. The fireman must be taking her out.

A good boy, Wig Hollis, evidently desirous to help; but Job wished he had left her in the stall. Sighing his relief, Job headed to catch the table as it came around.

Then the right-hand side of the cab hove into view as the table halted, and the turner clanged his gong. Under the pitiless glare of the yard arcs, a man was limned therein, manipulating the Johnson bar.

Job staggered, gasping. It was not Wig. It was—

The 2800 bumped off the table. Gurgling inarticulate emotion, Mr. Bunce loped in chase. He caught her as she reached the water-crane, hove himself into the cab, and addressed the interloper who was spotting the tank manhole under the spout.

"I'm here now," he announced, striving to deceive by an assumption of false calm that was marred by the heavings of his agitated breast.

Engineer Lozier calmly clamped the wheels with the independent brake.

"I see you, but you're too late; I've been called for the run," he rejoined. Drawing out his watch, he became absorbed in setting the lubricator-feeds.

Job hopped from one foot to the other. Nobody but himself knew the exact amount of oil to feed those cylinders.

"I say I'm here now. I'll do—"

"I heard you the first time, and I said I'd been called for the run. Did you hear that?" Andy interrupted.

"But it's my run—and you'll ruin my engine!" Mr. Bunce wailed.

"Maybe I will," Andy agreed, with a heartless smile of pure villainy. "I've wanted to find out for a good while if she's as good as you claim, and now I will, if I have to hammer all the stuffin' out of her!"

This was precisely the vision that tormented Job.

"I'll see about this!" he raged, dropping to the ground.

"Rabbits are sure bad medicine, aren't they?" Andy jeered from the cab-window.

The wings of despair wafted Mr. Bunce to the engine despatcher.

"Why did you put Andy Lozier on my run?" he vociferated as he poked his head through the window. "Now that I'm here, pull him off!"

"I can't do that," the despatcher regretted. "You know the rules, same as I do. You were over fifteen minutes late, so I called the next man out."

There was a quality to the grins on the despatcher's face and those of the other men loafing in the office that gave Job pause.

"Look here, Andy was at home when I left—how did he get around so quick?" he demanded

"Likely he didn't run into any jack-rabbits," the despatcher hazarded, with a guffaw

Jack-rabbits!

Enlightenment surged upon Job. Now did he perceive the whole diabolical plot. Now was explained Andy's hitherto inexplicable fancy to keep a pair of rabbits.

Quivering with his passionate sense of outrage, he addressed Bigfoot Jennings:

"This is a frame-up. A frame-up to do me out of my turn and let Lozier ruin my engine. I don't care if you're all in it.

"Jennings, you're chairman of the adjustment committee, and I demand that you take this outrage up. I wasn't used on my regular assigned run when I was ready, and I want my rights!"

"You haven't got any—you were late," Jennings pointed out.

"What made me late? I was framed!" Job insisted hotly.

"Aw, forget it," Jennings advised. "Do you want everybody to give you the laugh for lettin' a rabbit scare you out of eight sixty?"

"Let 'em laugh!" Job flung back. "It ain't only that I want my money. There's the pree-cee-dent.

"Why, if they get away with this, anybody could take my engine—and think of her!" he wailed, overcome by contemplation of what might happen to his beloved

"Andy Lozier 'll cut her cylinders. He'll start her flues leakin'. He—it 'll take me a month to get her back where she was!"

There was no sympathetic ear in that company. At last something had been hung upon Job. Life looked rosier.

They indulged themselves with ghoulish speculation as to what Andy could do to the 2800 and still get the train over the road.

Refused countenance by his fellows, Job took his troubles to Sieveright. Referred back to the adjustment committee as the proper medium of complaint, he went direct to the super and put up a brilliant piece of special pleading against bad precedent.

But that jury was packed, too. The super threw his case out of court unless it were presented by the committee. In that event he would lay it before the arbitration board. But the adjustment committee emphatically refused to entertain his petition.

The fact that Andy had returned the 2800 unharmed weighed with Job not at all. He wanted his rights clearly established by official pronunciamento. And the road owed him eight-sixty.

He wrote a letter to the president of the company. The exact terms of the answer were never known, but it was understood that the president could not interfere in a divisional dispute.

Undaunted, Job swore to carry his point. Considering the committee's disposition, that looked hopeless. And yet—had the possibilities of his collecting that eight sixty been formulated as a sporting proposition, there would not have been lacking men to take the short end of a fat bet.

March and the first warm rain found Job temporarily baffled but entirely unwilling to admit defeat.

"Soon as the 2800 goes into the shop I'll run down and make the president see it my way," he declared.

The rain melted the high-banked snow and loosened up the scenery that winter had cemented into place. Our annual spell of trouble was upon us.

The second day it was raining in torrents, with a high wind. Lost River was over its banks, an engine was coupled to the wrecking-train, steam was kept up in the big hundred-and-fifty-ton crane, and the crew was lying around making bets as to whether heaved tracks, land-slip, or wash-out would call them first

With things in this condition, the president and board of directors took a notion to blow along, bound to the west end, to work back on their annual tour of inspection. The super and Sieveright decided that, all things considered, Job was the

proper man to handle that special. They sent for him and put it up to him.

"I know I'm the best man, and I'd like to oblige you, gentlemen," Mr. Bunce averred, "but until this here question of pree-cee-dent is settled, I'll stick to my regular run."

"Oh, darn you and your precedent!" snapped the super, whose patience was wearing thin.

Andy Lozier got the special. He left thirty minutes ahead of No. 3, his ears ringing with admonitions to take no chances.

When Job piloted the 2800 out of the yard, the gale-driven rain was falling in sheets so dense that they formed an impenetrable wall a hundred feet ahead, against which even his powerful head-light was impotent.

He felt his way cautiously through it, his bullet-head thrust into the fury of the storm, his little eyes all screwed up with his efforts to pierce that wall. It was a night to try the most phlegmatic temperament.

Tempest was, however, insufficient to disturb his magnificent calm. His squat figure bulked stolid in its seat, calm, immovable, superior.

In the spells between fires Wig Hollis sought the gangway to peer anxiously into the murk. All familiar landmarks were blotted out. To Wig they seemed to be rushing blindly through the murk, but some peculiar sixth sense gave Job his bearings.

At times he drove ahead, sensing, in a way at which the fireman marveled, that solid track unrolled in front of the pilot. Anon, he slowed to a crawl, and presently the sheen of waters in the head-light's baffled rays told of track overflowed.

Again, a sickening tremor in the engine's fabric warned of the quaking muskeg that shakily upbore her weight. There would be work for the extra gangs as soon as the rain let up.

So they passed three block-stations, and Lost River lay an hour behind.

"Funny we haven't heard anything of Andy Lozier," Job commented, drawing his streaming face into the cab to gnaw a hunk of black plug. "I'm afraid I did wrong not to take that special; the president should have the best there is."

He wagged his head forebodingly. "Ain't anybody knows this old pike like I do. But then, there's pree-cee-dent. If I'd give up my rights this once, they'd think I'd ought to do it again."

Whang—whang!

Two torpedoes cut loose under the truck-wheels. Job instantly shut off and projected half his body through the window, his left hand ready on the brake-valve.

Below and behind him, Hollis, in the gangway, also searched for the glimmer of red that would indicate the flagman going in, or the tail-lights of the special. One mile, two miles rolled slowly behind the drivers, but they saw nothing.

"Seven miles to Blackfish!" Job called to Hollis. "Andy can't be far ahead. He wouldn't take any chances with the bay a night like this. Likely we'll be steppin' on his tail before we get there."

Proceeding with the utmost caution, expecting every moment to be halted by the special's flagman, they covered the miles that lay between them and the wild lake-surf at Blackfish Bay. The engine swayed to the first bank of the curve, rounded the spur of rock, and took the rightward curving leg of the horseshoe.

Ahead, the blackness seemed filled with swift-blowing white fog, gleaming unearthly in the diffused radiance of the arc; the gale had shattered the bay ice. Heavy surf was breaking in clouds like driving snow that blew across the track and volleyed onward far inland.

Through it there moved a frenzied arch of ruby light. The whistle's answering shriek was lost in the ears of the man who blew it, carried away by the gale.

But the agency behind that arch of ruby heard it and knew his warning heeded. The arch became a pin-point, jerking up and down to the stumbling run of the man who carried it.

As Job blew out his own flag, a corpse-faced trainman, his clothes sodden, the water running from him in streams, stumbled into the gangway.

"Our engine and first car slid into the lake!" he gasped.

Job spat.

"I was lookin' for somethin' like that. Who got caught?"

"I don't know."

The flagman was leaning against a tank-leg, breathing with the heavy inspirations of a spent runner.

"I was ridin' the observation-platform. Andy was just crawlin'—not over five miles an hour—then I felt a jar, and we stopped.

"I took a look and saw only three cars, so I figure the baggage went with the engine. I never stopped to find out, but hustled back to flag you!"

"Cut her loose from the train!" Job directed Wig Hollis. "We'll go see what we can do. How far is it?" he added to the flagman.

"I don't know," the boy confessed. "I was too busy fightin' the water to tell how far I'd come."

The conductor boarded the engine.

"What's up, Job—what are you cuttin' off for?"

"The special's slid into the lake. I'm goin' along to see what to do," Job explained briefly.

"But you can't do anything. If she's in, she's in," the conductor protested. "We ought to back our own train out of danger."

"Our train's safe," Job snapped, reaching for the throttle. "I ain't like the rest of you dubs; there's always somethin' I can do"

The conductor, wavering uncertainly, let him have his way. There was no use of arguing with a man who did not lose his bumptiousness even under these circumstances

Very slowly Job pushed the engine around the sharp horseshoe. The wind howled as spitefully as ever, but the rain was slackening.

The beam of his headlight, gaining strength as the damping blanket lifted, played along the chord of the arc, struck the cars of the special, ranged onward, and illumined a dark mass in the lake that was the wrecked engine and car.

Great seas broke over it, to hurl themselves in clouds of white spray on a huddled group of figures holding their footing at the verge of the crumbling bank.

As Job and the conductor dashed toward them, they saw one, more venturesome than the rest; an elderly man, half-clad and bareheaded, his thin hair streaming in the wind. He was half crouched, gazing at the wreck, and heedless of the entreaties of a younger man who plucked at his elbow, imploring him to step back.

"All hands clear?" Job yelled as he reached the group

The elderly man turned to him.

"The fireman thinks our engineer may be caught in the cab."

"Ain't anybody been to look?" Mr. Bunce asked with withering contempt.

President Mitchell shook his head, pointing at the boiling hell of waters. The engine had gone down head first. She stood now on her nose; her back end upreared and propped by her tender, jammed under the fire-box so that both formed an inverted V.

A scant ten feet separated her from the men on the bank, but between the seas eddied and sucked. Every few seconds one dashed clear over the cab. She hung teetering to the sidewise fall that every moment threatened to bring.

Peeling off his leather coat, Job Bunce jerked a command over his shoulder:

"Some of you hustle and get all the signal-cord out of those cars!"

The president laid a hand on his shoulder. "You can't do anything. No man could reach that cab. Look! The engine may fall over any instant!"

"I see," Job rejoined, stolidly knotting the stout-woven bell cord. "Seems like the people on this pike'll never believe that I'll do anything I say I can," he complained, passing a loop of the cord over his shoulders.

He tossed the coil to his own conductor.

"Couple of you haul me in if I look like drowndin'," he directed.

Then, coolly disregarding any further protest, he stepped to the edge of the cave in.

The bank crumbled, and he shot downward, brought up waist deep in the boiling smother. Three steps forward, with arms outstretched to ward off the buffeting combers, and he could almost touch his goal.

But a few tantalizing inches beyond his reach, the tottering engine seemed to nod to him mockingly. He slipped into a hole, went under, and came up again, sobbing and retching for breath.

If Andy was in that cab, he'd get him. He'd said he would— and he would! His fumbling hands clasped on a driver-spoke. He gripped it and pulled upward, searching for a foot-hold. The precarious balance of the upreared engine failed.

Slowly—oh, the agonizing slowness of it—she sagged over and downward upon him. Job, kicking backward and sidewise, tried to fling himself clear. The water baffled him, the crushing mass of the engine bore him under.

Great roarings filled his ears. His lungs were ready to burst. He reached out madly, fumbling a way to the surface.

Suddenly he realized that he was clear. He could drink in air in great gulps; air that was free of spray and tinctured with faint reminiscences of a familiar odor.

Warm valve-oil! Was the lubricator leaking? How far ahead was Andy Lozier with that special? Curse the rain that clogged his sight!

Then his sight and his senses cleared. He was in Andy's cab, and he laughed aloud in triumph.

For there was Andy, limp and senseless, most surprisingly clasped in his arms.

The rest was a trifling matter to Job Bunce; merely a question of dragging Andy's dead-weight through a window the slight achievement of one half-drowned man holding another half-drowned man in his arms, while eager hands dragged them both ashore by the thin, stout cord that cut cruelly into Job's unprotected chest.

At President Mitchell's request, Engineer Job Bunce attended a special meeting of the board, held in the president's official car the following noon.

When the president's secretary inquired of Mr. Bunce as to whether he felt equal to the strain, said Mr. Bunce, luxuriating in a brass bed in a stateroom, had averred that such an incident as last night's was negligible in his eventful life, and that he would be on hand, punctual to the minute, as was his custom, unless prevented by causes beyond his control, such as a frame-up

The secretary could make nothing of his speech, save that Job must be a trifle light-headed. However, he decided that Job was all right to hear what the president had to say, which, declaimed in the best presidential manner, was as follows:

"Mr. Bunce, my fellow directors and myself are proud to know that we have in the service a man capable of performing a deed of unselfish bravery such as yours. But for your courage, Andrew Lozier would not now be alive.

"We ask that you will accept this purse of one thousand dollars, to which we have all contributed, as a slight testimony of our esteem."

Thereupon he extended a fat roll of bills, while the other contributors beamed in the background.

But Job waved the testimonial aside.

"I don't want money for doin' my plain duty," he asserted. "It would likely establish a dangerous pree-cee-dent. Seein' me take money, the next feller would be likely to look around for his thousand dollars before doin' his duty."

"I hardly think that there is any danger of that," the president demurred, smiling.

"There might be," Job maintained. "Anyhow, I don't want money for goin' after Andy Lozier. Andy's a good boy, and I'd do him a favor any time. But, seein' as you're in an accommodatin' frame of mind, maybe you'll undertake to get me my rights."

"Anything I can do—" the puzzled president murmured uncertainly.

"There's a matter of not usin' me on my reg'lar run," Job explained. "It was liable to establish a dangerous pree-cee-dent, and cost me eight dollars and sixty cents. That money is mine by rights."

"Mr. Bunce, you have my word that the dispute shall be adjusted to your satisfaction," the president assured him.

That is why Lost River feels as it does about Case No. 147.

If there be any who take a contrary view, they find it safer not to mention the fact in the hearing of Andy Lozier.

# THE MOLDY OLD GRUDGE.

BY WILBUR HALL.

**Out of the Depths of the Misty Past Oil King Cole Digs the Makings of a Sweet Revenge.**

OIL KING COLE turned from a geologist's report to frown at the office-boy and to scowl over the card he had brought in. The boy, edging toward the door, was framing his lips to the short reply he would carry out to the visitor when he saw a change of expression come into the magnate's face.

Mr. Cole read the card aloud:

"MR. J. B. A. BUSCH,
"PRESIDENT, HANOVARIAN OIL COMPANY,
"SAN FRANCISCO."

Busch? Busch?

The messenger fidgeted

"Miss Fannon told the gentleman you were very busy," he explained, defensively.

Mr. Cole tossed his engrossing report aside and he chuckled

"Did, eh? Well, she's wrong. I want to see Mr. J. B. A. Busch.

"Tell him to wait a minute, though. And after you've told him, slide into Gallinger's room and ask him for my old-grudge file."

"Yes, sir."

The boy bounced away. His employer, a mighty figure in petroleum circles, and president or vice president or managing director or controlling factor in half the important oil corporations of the Pacific Coast, sat idly smiling until he bounced back again, bringing a folder full of documents. Mr. Cole took them.

"Now just stand over there by the window and catch flies, sonny," he said, opening the file. "I have a feeling that it is going to give me all the pleasure in life to see this man.

"Busch—B. No. Hanovarian—H Harper Hichborn Holtol Oil Refinery Com ah, here we are. Hanovarian Oil Company Midway Fields' - Forty-Four Group — burned my fingers in — in 1899, and then laughed at me! Laughed at *me!* How was it "

With a slightly heightened color but still smiling, he perused the paper before him. Business was forgotten. In Mr. Cole a strange metamorphosis was taking place, temporarily the capitalist was being submerged in the artist.

For he was an artist —an artist in grudge-bearing'

Twenty years before he had discovered in himself the latent stirrings of genius and had commenced to develop them assiduously. At first he had practised on fresh grudges, newly acquired and promptly and carelessly repaid.

But as his tastes became more refined and his technique more finished, he had begun to achieve the true connoisseur's passion for the antique, until now that grudge which was most sadly ravaged by the processes of time, most mildewed, cobwebby, and moldy, was for him the most perfect

He prided himself on his discrimination as to values in grudges, and on his large and varied collection, and it was one of his oldest and proudest possessions he now held in the waiting-room in the person of the president of the Hanovarian Oil Company.

"All right, young chain-lightning," he said finally, restoring his papers to their folder: "let's see what we can do Mr. Busch for. And when you've shown him in, tell Gallinger I'm not to be disturbed."

The boy went out, and the caller entered. Mr. Cole, who had never met him before, beheld a large, flabby, red-faced man, wearing spectacles over puckered eyes, with a mustache like a stiff brush, and with his sparse, black hair starting from his florid forehead in indignant pompadour.

He was well-fed and well-clothed, but as serious as a priest at a christening. Greetings were exchanged, together with what is colloquially known as the time o' day, Mr. Busch was seated, the customary gibes as between residents of San Francisco and residents of Los Angeles were bandied back and forth, and then Mr. Busch was invited to state his business.

He did so, eloquently and impressively, taking fifteen minutes for the job

When he had finished, Mr. Cole lighted a small cigar, eyed his visitor speculatively for a moment, tapped idly with his forefinger on the file-folder at his hand, and then grunted.

"H-m! So you want to sell me the Forty-Four Group in the Midway, do you?" he asked slowly. "And you're pumping how much oil there, now?"

"Between twenty-three and twenty-four hundred barrels a day. And four new holes likely to be brought in at any time. I am offering you, Mr. Cole, the best oil property on the California market."

"Of course you are," Cole retorted. "And that's what makes me suspicious. I think you mentioned something about an upset price."

"We can get together on the price, Mr. Cole."

"What about that government suit against you? I can buy a job-lot of law suits any time, you know, at reduced figures."

"Suit! Pfitt!" Mr. Busch snapped his fingers. "That's a joke. The interior department claims that we failed to do the required amount of development work prior to the Taft withdrawal order in 1909. Mere wind!"

"Oh, wind! Not accompanied, as far as you know, by rain, hail, sleet, or black frost? I see. Then you want to sell because—"

"I've explained that. I have other interests and I'm getting out of the vicinity of California.'

"Forced to sell, eh? That's clear. But I'd like to ask a question. Why do you want to sell?"

"Why? I've answered that."

"Oh, sure you have. Now tell me the truth!"

Mr. Busch's face reddened.

"I'm not in the habit of—"

"Oh, don't waste time, Busch. Come on through!"

His visitor rose.

"You and I don't seem to understand each other, Mr. Cole," he said stiffly. "Your business-methods are offensive—as long as you refuse to consider this important deal "

"Oh, Lord bless you, Busch, I don't refuse to consider any deal! Trouble with you is that you get overheated too easily. That's dangerous."

Mr. Busch snorted, barked a gruff farewell, and started to move away.

"Before you go," Oil King Cole said, arrestingly, "give me a little information, will you? I'm trying to remember the name of the man the Hanovarian company bought the Forty-Four Group from. What was it Hough? Guff?"

Busch turned his puckered, near-sighted eyes on Cole.

"I don't remember. That was eight or nine years ago—"

"But I'd like to know Seems to me it was Clough, now."

"Perhaps it was."

"I know it was. Mason Clough. Thanks.

"Don't overheat yourself, Busch, and I'll think about your proposition. Turn to your right in the hall. Good-by."

When his door closed Oil King Cole chuckled for a full minute, the light of battle in his eyes.

"Sensitive about that man Clough!" he mused, in retrospect. "Short as to temper and thin as to skin! Got a good property that he wants to ease out from under!

"We'll find out why, and then we'll play with Mr. Busch. Play with him! Get him on the run and tickle him with a prod!

"Hey, Gallinger!"

His general manager appeared at an

inner door. Mr. Cole contemplated him abstractedly, smiling and giving voice to unintelligible exclamations and humorous expletives. Gallinger frowned austerely.

"I suppose it's on me, Mr. Cole. Were you thinking of the mistake in those Grossmont contracts—or is it that matter of shipping Nearn & Co. low-test gasoline by mistake. If it is—"

"It isn't," his chief interrupted good naturedly. "Your conscience needs osteopathic treatment, Fred; can't I be pleased and happy for two minutes without your jumping at the conclusion that some of your dunder-headed clerks have rocked the boat again! I only called you in, Gallinger, to look at the carpet."

Gallinger glanced downward:

"The—the carpet?"

"Yep! This carpet, on which you tread so lightly now, is going soon to be covered with rich, red blood. Cheer up, Fred! Smile, darn you! Sound the timbrels and the sackbut and make a joyful noise!

"The Hanovarian Oil Company is in trouble. I don't know exactly why nor where, but I do know that when the enemy is making for the bomb-proof cellars the time is ripe to chuck a hand-grenade in after him. Where's Angus Lacey?"

"In Fullerton," the puzzled manager returned. "He'll probably be there for several weeks if—"

"Oh, no, he won't, Fred! I'm trying to tell you that war has broken out and that I'm going to appoint Angus Lacey to the job of chief assassin. Here's the telephone, whistle in it and get Lacey up here at a trot. And tell him it will be a perfectly heavenly battle, dripping with beautiful red gore!"

Manager Gallinger scowled his disapproval, but put in the required long-distance call. Then he turned to his chief.

"This seems to be one of my stupid mornings, Mr. Cole; I can't remember that we've ever had any row with the Hanovarian company."

"No, I suppose you can't, Fred seeing that the cause of all the trouble is about nine years old, now. But don't let that worry you. I've just had a caller."

"Busch, of San Francisco?"

"Busch, of San Francisco, president and controlling figure in the Hanovarian. Do you know anything of the company's property?"

"I only know they operate in the Midway, and are getting to be pretty heavy producers lately."

"Uncanny your knowledge. Still, you can't see why I should want to twine my fingers in their neck-bands, eh?"

"No—I'm not subtle enough."

"I'll tell you about it, then. Sit down. Along in 1908 Bob Moran, the geologist, gave me a tip that there was a claim in the Midway belonging to a man named Forbes that was dripping with oil.

"I took a run up there later, but found that it had already been optioned by some promoter who was trying to swing it with a lot of other pieces that he had got together and that he called the Forty-Four Group.

"He talked in millions, and as I was operating on a shoe-string in those days I had to pass him up. I hated to do it, too, because the Forbes ground was all that Moran had said.

"I think it was a year later before I heard of the land again, and then a promoter named Mason Clough wrote offering to option that Forbes claim to me at a hundred thousand. I wired him to send the option, and he did, by an agent. It looked good to me and I signed, quick."

The oil king grunted.

"Too quick, in fact."

"How do you mean, Mr. Cole."

"Wait a shake and I'll tell you. Clough and his friends had some foreign capital in tow, but their deal was hanging fire. When they got my offer of a hundred thousand for the Forbes claim they used it to rush their capitalists along it was bait, and I furnished it!

"The foreigners came in, convinced that if a California operator was willing to pay a hundred thousand for one twenty-acre piece the whole Forty-Four Group must be pretty good speculative property. The Hanovarian company was organized and I was out."

"But I thought you took an option on the Forbes—"

"I thought so too, Gallinger. It seems I was mistaken.

"I've just been refreshing my memory. Cast your eyes over this and see whether it fattens your subtlety average any!"

From the file-folder the office-boy had brought him, Oil King Cole took several papers and spread them out before his manager.

All were neatly docketed: "O. K. C. Private: IV—18. Hanovarian Oil Company." The first record was an option on the Forbes claim, given by Mason Clough. Under it were two or three telegrams, relating to the deal, then a cancelled check for one thousand two hundred and fifty dollars, made out to Clough by Owen K. Cole, and finally there was a letter.

It was eight years old, as were all the papers, and Gallinger took it up and read it carefully. Beholding this:

O. K. C Private: IV—18 f

HANOVARIAN OIL CO.
SAVAGE, WHITSON AND MORPHY,
Attorneys-at Law
Los Angeles, California
October 11, 1900.

MR. OWEN K COLE,
President Atlas Oil Co,
Los Angeles, California.

MY DEAR MR. COLE: At your request of even date, I am returning to you herewith the Forbes piece option for your files Also at your suggestion I beg to recount the incidents connected with this transaction for future reference

On the third inst. I went to Bakersfield, at your request, to exercise option given you by Mason Clough on the Forbes claim in the Midway oil district, taking with me cashier's checks for the amount due under your option. Unable to locate Clough, and finding that he was out of the transaction, I had a meeting with the attorneys for the Hanovarian Oil Company, successor to Clough They laughingly informed me that Mr. Clough had used your option in securing capital he wanted, and that the option was a trap and worthless. My examination of the document showed me at once that Clough had omitted the legally essential "for value received" clause. My opinion is that both Clough and the attorneys for the Hanovarian Company, if not President Jos Busch himself, whom I could not see, were parties to this fraud on you

I am still of the opinion, given you orally yesterday, that you have no recourse in law, the only responsible party, Mason Clough having left the State without leaving any clue to his present whereabouts

Yours very truly,
EDWARD A. MORPHY,
Counsel, Atlas Oil Co.

Manager Gallinger looked up, found his chief's gaze on him, and contrived a sneeze.

"Oh, don't mind me, Fred!" Mr. Cole snapped. "Go ahead and laugh. That's what that San Francisco crowd did—but I've been saving my merriment until now, and I'm full of it. Let me remind you to look at the carpet."

"I don't doubt your ability to daub it with the Hanovarian company's gore, Mr. Cole," the manager replied, dryly. "But how are you going to do it?"

"Haven't the ghost of an idea, beyond putting Lacey on the trail and perhaps taking a squint at the market to see whether I can pick up any loose Hanovarian stock. You'd better have Sterling and Page attend to that for me, too, by the way. And there's the telephone. If it's Lacey tell him to drop everything and run!"

Sterling and Page made a report a week later that caused Mr. Cole another spell of chuckling, and a few days thereafter a telegram came stating that Angus Lacey was still on the trail, and that the trail had carried him over most of the State and brought him up at Bakersfield. Cole wired:

ANGUS LACEY,
Hotel Southern, Bakersfield
Sharpen the ax. O. K. C

His young field-superintendent, persistent by nature and thorough by training, read the laconic message with a grin. He had stalked the Hanovarian Oil Company with certain success—that is, he knew now that that corporation was not at all certain of success in defending the government's suit to confiscate the Forty-Four Group as a penalty for lax development methods in the early days.

Rumors, reports, second-hand gossip and derrick-talk about the corporation and its president, J. B. A. Busch, he had found in plenty, but as a whole his investigation left something to be desired

Then he stumbled on a trail. It was that

of an old driller, Dan Ferguson by name The only trouble was that Ferguson, though unquestionably ready and willing to give information was as crazy as a hatter, and Bakersfield authorities and citizens sniffed when Angus asked about him there.

"If you want to have your liquor drunk appreciatively and gratefully, Lacey," one of his informants said, "go on and find Dan. He'll talk enough to give a grand jury the nightmare, but even our newest and greenest newspaper reporters and our latest and most gullible district attorneys always stop him before he gets to 'ninthly.' Don't let me discourage you, though."

Angus grinned.

"Thanks for them kind and cheerin' words, Mr. Anderson," he said. "I think, though, I'll try Petroleum Dan, on a long chance. Where does he keep himself when he is at home?"

"A home is something Dan Ferguson doesn't possess, Lacey. If he isn't at the Southern Bar he may be at Luke's Place, or in heaven or in the county jail. Or anywhere else, for that matter. Take your choice."

"Much obliged for nothing," Angus said, gloomily. "I'd like to go back to Mr. Cole with an alibi, anyway. So-long."

He went out, and sought the Southern Bar. Uselessly. From there he went to Luke's Place; from there to Somebody Else's Place; from there to another bar, thence to the county jail, thence to the city jail, thence, about ten o'clock that night, to the sidewalk, where he stood looking at the stars and wondering, despondently, whether his man had been, by some mistake, caught up in a chariot of fire.

A passing stranger, eying Angus, stopped.

"Hello, there!" he said abruptly. "Ain't you the fellow that was asking about crazy old Petroleum Dan in the Driller's Saloon this evening?"

"I am," Lacey replied. "Do you know anything I don't?"

"If you'll hurry you may get to Luke's in time to catch Dan between the door and the gutter. Mike Doyle will be kicking him out about now. Good night."

Angus Lacey threw a hasty word of thanks over his shoulder and fled. At the saloon named the bartender jerked a thumb over his shoulder toward the booths in the rear.

"We've been thinkin' you might be back, sorr," he growled, flourishing a soiled bar-towel. "So we've kep' him for ye.

"If ye've all night to spare, Dan will be pourin' beer into himself and gibberish into you till the crack o' dawn. Get into him, then."

Angus, anticipating the worst, was not disappointed. Petroleum Dan Ferguson was a wretched, grizzled, hairy old tramp, poring over a great accumulation of soiled and torn papers, clippings, documents, and bundles of closely written memoranda; beyond words, filthy; beyond conception, ragged; beyond belief, unpromising.

He started up crazily when Angus addressed him, and for half an hour the patient young Scot exerted his utmost tact to convince him that his story, or his complaint, or his autobiography, or whatever he had that obsessed him, could be shared with safety. Even then only a chance word caught his attention.

"Clough, you said? Mason Clough? Did I know him? Darned if I didn't, young fellow!

"I could tell you something— You're not working for the government, you say?"

"Not me, Dan," Angus answered, cheerfully. "I'm working for a man who would like to have a word standing up with Mason Clough, if he could be found—"

Petroleum Dan leaned forward and touched Lacey's sleeve.

"You say you're friendly, young Lacey. You have the look of it. Darned if you haven't'

"Listen: they laugh at me, and they call me crazy, and I guess I am. But I'll tell you. I can tell you. Will you hark a minute?"

"Dan," Angus Lacey said gravely, "if you want to start at the beginning and take your time I'll hear you through, clear to the end. I've got nothing else on my mind. Is that fair enough?"

"You are fair enough and you are friendly enough. That's all Petroleum Dan wants. Wait—where are they?"

He fumbled hurriedly through his pa-

pers, took more from cavernous pockets, spread them out with feverish tenseness, then gulped:

"Ah, here it is—the very first one."

He held up a scrawled sheet, peered at it through his bushy eyebrows, and began to speak, eagerly, breathlessly, but clearly, as one might repeat a lesson learned through countless repetitions.

"It begins," he said, in his strained old voice, just above a whisper, "it begins in March, 1907, when Dean Batcheller first took me out of the gutter in Indianapolis and brought me here to Bakersfield. I had been in the Pennsylvania fields as a kid, and I knew something about oil.

"I was as good a driller, in my day, as ever turned a temper screw. And Batcheller was coming out here to make his fortune in oil. So he brought me—drunken Petroleum Dan—and he brought his pretty little wife. That's where it begins."

He sorted out another paper, added it to the one in his hand, and passed them to Angus.

"Just put these down in front of you," he said, hurriedly, "and you can look at them later. Now. Dean Batcheller was square and he was a hustler. It wasn't two months till he was buying and selling options here.

"The boom came on fast—you remember? Batcheller made money. He kept me in his house—drunken old Dan with that pretty wife of his, just because that way I wouldn't get out and go to drinking again.

"That's what he did. And it kept me from drinking, too

"I helped him all I could, and I guess I paid him back partly. Partly. I drilled his first well for him, and he sold the lease it was on for a fat price. It belongs to the Union now, and they're still pumping it.

"There—there's the papers on that, all writ down, plain as print. I'm not telling you anything I can't prove, young Lacey, remember that!

"Things went on prospering until the fall of 1908. Little Mrs. Batcheller was—was sewing. Funny little trinkets of clothes, that a man would split if he put two fingers in. You understand? All right. There's a paper on that, too. Put it down with the others.

"And Batcheller was working at last on the two big deals that were going to make him rich for life. Darned big deals, young Lacey. See here."

He took up additional papers, sorted them into two piles, and passed them over.

Angus glanced at them, as he had at the others. He saw now what the old man's litter of documents comprised—his own diaries, notes, and memoranda, newspaper and oil journal clippings mentioning Batcheller and his activities, letters relating to oil-field transactions or speculations, some of them addressed to Batcheller, some to Ferguson himself, and miscellaneous documents or packages of documents twine-tied, all dog-eared, soiled, and worn and all of doubtful value save as reminders that prevented the driller's mind wandering completely away from the history that so absorbed him.

"Go on, Dan," Angus said. "Batcheller was working on the two big deals."

"That's right. They were big. Five hundred acres in the heart of the Sunset district—that land is worth ten million, twenty million to-day, and cheap at that. The other was a group of claims in the Midway—in the line of the proved oil-belt.

"Young Dean Batcheller, that was keeping old Dan Ferguson out of the gutter all this time, was getting options on these two pieces of property, a little here and a little there, day by day, and bit by bit, until he had them all.

"Do you hear that? Had them all!

"The Sunset deal pretty near closed and the Midway options ready to sell. He wanted to get money enough out of the Midway to keep the Sunset ground for himself and that little wife—and the—well, something that was going to wear all those baby-size clothes. The Midway deal was ready to offer by the middle of July, 1909."

Angus Lacey was leaning close now, waiting for every word. "It was known as the Forty-Four Group, wasn't it, Dan?"

"Darned if it wasn't. It was the Forty-Four Group, eight hundred acres, worth a million to Batcheller if he could close it out—and with a million he could swing the

Sunset land almost alone. Oh, that was a time!"

For a moment the sharp old eyes blazed with the memory, then the light in them died.

"It was too good to last, young Lacey—that time was. In August little Mrs. Batcheller went into the hospital—I've got the date here some place—but she didn't come out as they told Batcheller she would

"She was mighty sick. Batcheller was worried until he was almost crazy, with the sickness and the two big deals—and everything depending on them.

"Well, the baby came, but it died. Batcheller told me about it and he cried And I cried. Darned if I ain't crying now and it isn't the second time, either!

"Wait, I'm all right. It was about the time the baby died that Batcheller first met Clough. Clough wanted to handle the Forty-Four Group and said he had the capital—German capital, I think

"So Batcheller dickered with him days, and spent the nights sitting by little Mrs. Batcheller in the hospital, trying to bring her through. Hard on a man, that sort of life, Lacey.

"But Batcheller had to keep going. And Clough finally got his men in San Francisco lined up and told Batcheller the deal was on. Damn him! If only Batcheller had never heard of him! He did, though, and he thought he saw daylight ahead, Batcheller did."

Old Dan Ferguson wiped his forehead hastily and cleared his throat.

"Clough had to take the proposition to Germany, and he wanted Batcheller's options so he could close as soon as he got to where his moneyed men were waiting. A person can't understand how slick those slick guys are, Lacey—they just are.

"He talked Batcheller into giving him the options on the Forty-Four Group, with only a short paper to explain the deal—a memorandum of agreement, that was what they called it. It was all over in an hour, when they got down to it, and then—"

"Wait a minute, Dan," Angus Lacey interrupted. "I want to get this thing straight. Batcheller turned the options over to Clough and took a memorandum showing how the profits from the deal were to be split. Was that it?"

"Yes, that was it. Twenty per cent to Clough—the balance to Batcheller. It's all written down here—I wrote it down then, when Batcheller told me about it."

"Then when Clough went away the options stood in his name?"

"So he could handle the deal in Germany—that's right."

"Did Batcheller get any money?"

"Yes, five thousand. I know, because I carried the check over to the Bakersfield Trust Company that same evening, to pay it in on the Sunset deal, that Batcheller was closing at this same time."

"I suppose from that, then, that Batcheller was putting everything he had on the two turns of the wheel—midway with Clough and the Sunset for himself."

Old Petroleum Dan nodded emphatically and put his stubby finger on Lacey's arm.

"Every penny he had," he said, emphasizing each phrase with his blunt finger. "The night Clough left for Germany—Batcheller didn't have—one—cent!"

"All clear, then. Go on."

"All clear, then. Am I crazy, young Lacey? Listen to what comes next.

"Mrs. Batcheller got worse. Clough was gone three weeks and there wasn't a word from him. More money was needed for the Sunset deal.

"I was just in the way, I suppose, fretting Batcheller when he had enough to fret him without an old wreck like me hanging around. But he let me clean up his office and straighten his desk for him—I would have blacked his boots if he would have let me, Lacey! He said I helped him by putting things away for him—but before God, Lacey, I didn't lose that paper! I never saw the paper!"

"What paper, Dan?"

"Wait, I'm getting mixed. That doesn't come yet. What comes next is these dates here. Listen to them first!"

The old man took up a greasy old pocketbook and thumbed through it to find a memorandum.

"Ah, yes, Lacy. Here. It was August 25 that Clough left to close his deal. On September 23 an agent came down from

San Francisco and began closing on the Forty Four Group options, paying hard cash to the original owners.

"Batcheller knew then the deal had gone through, but he hadn't heard from Clough. So he cabled—see, here is a copy of it.

"And on the 25th he got his answer. Look!"

The old man, with feverish face and trembling hands, found a rumpled sheet in the mass before him and passed it to Lacey. It was torn and the typewritten words were faded, but the message was clear. It read.

BATCHELLER, Bakersfield

Some mistake on your part. Options sold to me twenty-fifth ult Already turned over here. Think you misunderstood terms of deal CLOUGH

"The dirty hound!" Angus Lacey cried, abruptly. "The grafting crook!"

Petroleum Dan's voice shook and he clenched his gnarled old hands.

"You see, don't you? I've been trying to get somebody to listen to me for eight years, but they all laughed. Do you wonder I'm crazy?

"But there's more. It was the 26th when Batcheller realized he had been robbed of a million dollars' worth of oil-land options. It drove him crazy. On the night of the 26th, while he was trying to decide what to do to beat Clough, little Mrs. Batcheller died. She died!"

Angus Lacey swallowed hard.

"There, there, Dan," he said, uncomfortably. "Let me see if I can help you any. I'm beginning to recall a date or two myself. All this happened on the 26th of September, 1909. And on the 27th, if I'm not mistaken "

"You're not!" Dan Ferguson shrilled, excitedly. "You're right, and I wish you wasn't! On the 27th of September, 1909, President Taft issued his order withdrawing California oil-lands from entry—and a scratch of the pen turned Batcheller's Sunset deal into a wreck—and ruined him!

"Ruined him, and drove him out of his mind for good, I guess. Two days later he disappeared. Right after the funeral he went away. And I've never seen him since!"

Angus Lacey puzzled.

"But why, Dan?" he demanded. "He had that memorandum of agreement with Clough. Any lawyer—"

"That was it, young Lacey. I told you a minute ago that a paper was lost. It was, though I didn't lose it. It was the Clough agreement. We hunted for it high and low.

"We hunted for it Batcheller and I—as long as there was anything to hunt, or any place, but it wasn't found. It went like Batcheller—disappeared."

"Oh, that's it!"

Angus Lacey sat back, disappointed and shaken.

"I was hoping there was something to be done, Dan," he said slowly. "But with that paper gone and with Batcheller gone—do you suppose he's dead?"

Petroleum Dan sat looking straight at Lacey for a long minute. Some problem was being revolved behind his tangled whiskers, his matted hair, his febrile eyes. Finally he said, slowly:

"Lacey, you said you were friendly. You've heard me patient and kind. You know, if I'm crazy, what there's been to make a poor old soak of a driller crazy. Would you help some way, if I showed you how?"

Angus laid his big hand on Dan's shaking claw and gripped it tightly. "I'll go clear through for you, Dan, if you'll show me any way at all. Clear through to the end."

"Then whisper." Ferguson leaned near. "A month ago, young Lacey, I found where Dean Batcheller is. He's in the fields in Oklahoma, trying to make a new start.

"You'll get him here? Praise God! Praise— I'm not crying, Lacey—I'm laughing—laughing again!"

Attorney Eddie Morphy, of the firm of Whitson and Morphy, counsel for some eighteen oil companies owned by Oil King Cole, was having difficulties with his wife. She maintained, with a show of reason, that he was working too early, that he was working too late, that he was working all the time, and far too hard, and that this accumulation of labor was wearing on him and preventing his redemption of a promise,

once solemnly made, to love, honor, and cherish.

Morphy pleaded guilty to the charge, but offered in extenuation the statement that the principal client of his firm was a slave-driver.

"Oil King Cole," he said, over the breakfast coffee-cups, "is a great believer in the efficacy of application as a tonic, a toxic, a prophylactic and a a specific.

"An ordinary day's work for him is something to behold with fear and reverence, but when he is having a little fun with an enemy twenty-four hours is too short a day for his purpose. Especially when his staff is carrying the load."

"As now?" Mrs. Morphy suggested.

"As now—exactly. When Mr. Cole has resurrected a moldy old grudge and is trotting it out and putting it into harness my blissful home-life is doomed and shattered.

"This is one of those felicitous occasions. So there we are, my dear."

His dear sniffed.

"Is it still the case that frowzy old what's-his-name brought in? The man with the hair?"

"Yes, it is still Petroleum Dan Ferguson. But you wouldn't know Dan. He has been trimmed to within an inch of his life.

"He has been barbered and shampooed and manicured and bathed thin, and he smells like a department-store perfumery-section."

"Is he as crazy as he looks, Eddie?"

Morphy laughed.

"That's a stock question, my dear. I'm supposed to think that he is. But between you and me and the toaster—which is giving indications of catching fire, my love! Excuse me. Thanks. Between you and me I don't think he is."

"Perhaps he couldn't be," she suggested, caressing a burned finger-tip.

"Yes, by straining a point I think he could be. And the general verdict is that he most decidedly is.

"But lately I've been going over some of his atrocious papers with him I wish they could have been barbered and bay-rummed when Dan was!—and it seems to me that there is a pretty keen mind behind that lunatic-stare of his. I have a theory."

"As usual."

"Yes, as usual. I had one when I first saw you, dear, but it has been sadly—no, don't shoot, colonel; I'll come down!

"As I was saying before you endangered my life, my theory is that Dan Ferguson calculated on the effect of a reputation for insanity when he started on this search of his eight years ago, and calculated wisely.

"He knew that he could get more information and disarm suspicion more successfully as a harmless old nut, and he proceeded to adopt the part. He may have overdone the pose a little, but I should hate to have him concentrate on my lurid past as he has on the history of the Hanovarian Oil Company, that's all.

"If you ask me, Dan Ferguson is far less crazy than the sanest member of the supreme court of this State!"

His wife tilted her head. "They've decided another case against you, then," she sagely pronounced.

"Ouch! They have. On the ground that the construction of a paved road and a fourteen-hundred-dollar culvert cannot be held to be development-work necessarily pertaining to the completion of a contract to drill an oil-well.

"Crazy? Dan Ferguson on the bench in a case like that would be a scintillating orbit of translucid — All right, I'm going.

"And don't expect me home before seven. Good-by!"

Crazy or not Petroleum Dan Ferguson was awaiting the attorney at his offices. His face was red with excitement and he paced the floor impatiently. When Morphy appeared he hailed him with a shout.

"See here, Mr. Morphy, I've got an idea! Had it in the night. Couldn't sleep. A regular whale of an idea. Can I come in?"

"Sure, Dan. Good morning, Irene. When Whitson comes ask him if he'll attend to that notice of appeal in the Western Refining Company case, will you? All right, Dan, let's have your world-shaking inspiration."

The old man drew a chair up to Morphy's desk and cleared a space before him.

"I've got to get the lawing straightened out first," he began. "Suppose Mr. Lacey

finds Batcheller and brings him back safely, you understand, is there a good chance for him to win the Forty-Four Group back from the Hanovarian company? That's first."

Morphy nodded.

"I think, Dan," he said, judicially, "that we have better than a fifty-fifty chance, providing Batcheller's memory is good and that what you have told us will stand up in court. We can prove that he took the options originally—half a dozen of those old-timers who filed on the land will testify to that.

"We can prove that you did the development work for him and had it all up to snuff on the date that Clough came into the deal. And Clough's disappearance from off the face of the earth ought to help some. That isn't all I've planned to use, but in the rough it is our case to date."

"That's it! That's the way to talk. Now, how about another thing. The government is going to take a whack at those Forty-Four Group lands in two weeks, didn't you say?"

"The suit against the Hanovarian company is set for the nineteenth."

"Nineteenth. Yes, sir. Suppose the government won—where would Batcheller be then?"

"He would have an up-hill job getting a hearing. In other words, we've got to wait until the Hanovarian company wins this government fight before we can start a wheel turning."

"All right—that's how I thought it was. Now, listen to Crazy Dan Ferguson. We want the Hanovarian company to beat the government, don't we?"

"U-m! Yes. Certainly."

"We want the whole game or none of it, don't we?"

"Yes, I think that is a safe way to put it, Dan."

Petroleum Dan looked around him cautiously and touched the lawyer's arm.

"Suppose witnesses could be found that the Hanovarian company needs to prove up on its ground—people the Hanovarian company doesn't know anything about. How about that?"

"You mean—er—oh, I see! You are the witness, Dan?"

"I'm one of 'em. I know where there's two others."

He sat back, triumphant.

"Oh, I'm crazy, all right," he chuckled. "But I might be crazier, eh? Don't you think I might be even crazier than I am?"

Morphy, somewhat breathlessly, began to question Dan on the details. Ferguson answered promptly. Cross-examination failed to shake him.

He knew the original Forty-Four Group thoroughly and he could tell what he knew. Years before the Taft withdrawal order was issued he had prowled over it; months before that bomb-shell he had worked on the land for Dean Batcheller and others, and on the old Forbes claim, the most valuable of them all, he had superintended the drilling of two wells

"Then, how on earth," Morphy cried, aghast, "how on earth did Busch happen to overlook you when he was getting ready for this trial?"

Dan chuckled.

"He didn't."

"Didn't? What do you mean, Dan?"

"He sent a lawyer to see me about six weeks ago. I was crazier than usual that day, Mr. Morphy. Crazier than ever. And that lawyer went away, shaking in his boots."

"Why?"

"Because I told him I was just crazy enough to go to the government and put a spoke in his wheel when his case went to trial, that's why."

Morphy gasped.

"How long ago was that?"

"Five or six weeks."

"About the time Busch offered the Hanovarian company to Mr. Cole!" Morphy exclaimed, grinning. "Dan, you are the fine, invisible hand of Fate—but look here! Why didn't Busch try to get rid of you, or buy you up, or—or—"

Dan Ferguson suddenly struck the lawyer's desk and started up

"That was it!" he cried. "I am crazy, Morphy! I'm crazy as a loon! I didn't think—"

"What?"

"About a month ago a Bakersfield man tried to talk me into going to China to work

for the Standard. Said he had a fat job for me. I laughed at him.

"And a week or so later a Bakersfield lawyer tried to get me sent to the insane asylum. Of course, he didn't have any luck everybody in Kern County knew I was harmless, and the judge wouldn't even have me brought up. But Busch was scheming "

"Sure. Busch was scheming to get rid of you, at the same time get rid of the Hanovarian company. Come on, Dan, let's trot over and see Mr. Cole. Grab your hat."

Oil King Cole heard the attorney's story gloomily. The proposal to give his pet enemies the witnesses they needed to win their land in the government fight was a shade too subtle for him to hail with loud acclaim.

Morphy made no recommendations. The magnate questioned Dan Ferguson closely, and a little crossly.

"Well, Morphy," he grunted, finally, "we'll be taking a long shot on a dark horse, but it's up to you. I wish this mysterious Mr. Batcheller would show up."

Morphy nodded.

"A good deal depends on him. What have you heard from Lacey?"

"Lacey wired from Tulsa that his man had gone to the North Dakota fields. Apparently he's getting on his feet again, slowly."

Dan Ferguson broke in.

"He's the lad to do it, too, Mr. Cole!" he exclaimed, his face shining. "And won't he be surprised to come back here and step into a five-million-dollar —"

"He won't be any more surprised than the rest of us!" Oil King Cole snapped. "I'm spending about eleven-tenths of my time and most of my hard-earned savings to get even with a man I never saw and hand the winnings over to a man I never heard of!

"But it will be worth while if I catch the Hanovarian Busch in the press! That would be my idea of the end of a perfect day!"

Morphy spoke.

"Then you think I'd better send Dan up with young Ellison to San Francisco and have him tell his story to Judge Chittenden?"

"Whatever you think, Morphy."

The attorney held up a hand.

"Wait a minute, Mr. Cole—that isn't good enough. I don't know whether we can win in the end or not. I am not saying that we can.

"Batcheller may know where that memorandum of agreement is now, and he may not. He may recall the facts and he may not. Dan, here, will make a whaling good witness, and we have better than an even chance

"The question is whether you want to gamble big or gamble small, and it's your say, not mine."

Oil King Cole laughed.

"Passing the buck to the old man, eh?" he retorted. "You're going to have an alibi and let my conscience take care of the rest, aren't you? All right. I say go ahead— and Heaven help the losers!"

Young Ellison, aspiring to a place in the firm of Whitson and Morphy, took old Dan Ferguson to San Francisco that evening. En route they picked up two down-at-the-heel friends of Dan's at San Luis Obispo. Dan's papers were left behind for safe keeping, and Attorney Morphy set himself diligently to segregating them and having them copied.

At first he could make little headway, but as he became more familiar with Dan's eccentric system and his crabbed hand-writing, he found the task easier. Much of the material was worthless, more was cryptic.

But all through the tangle and the rubbish there ran the thread of a story—the early history of Dean Batcheller and his career as a promoter in the new Bakersfield oil-territory.

Day after day Morphy spelled his way through the papers, annotated the newspaper and oil-journal clippings, uncovered names likely to be of importance if their owners could be located, and contrived slowly to dictate to a stenographer the pertinent facts that might lead, in the end, to the establishment of a legal claim against the Hanovarian company, and to the triumphant climax of Oil King Cole's hoary grudge.

He was half-way through his enterprise when he came on a large bundle which he had never seen before. It was bound

with string, and when it was opened its condition evidenced the fact that it had been so bound for a long time. The outer coverings were stained and discolored, but the papers within were clean and whole, only their edges showing wear and the marks of handling.

Of much of the contents he could decipher nothing. Apparently they comprised such jottings and notes as a man makes in idle preoccupation. In one envelope Morphy finally found a water-bill, dated at Bakersfield, August, 1909. It was for eighty-five cents, and with it was a one-dollar bank-note.

Presently, still puzzling, the lawyer turned up a hospital-bill. He looked at the entry thereon and started. It was for the second week in August, and for services and room furnished Agatha Batcheller.

Abruptly, and in some excitement, he began to run through the remaining pieces. Unconsciously he held his breath. He suddenly felt certain that he knew what the bundle was—the litter of the desk of a distracted man, hastily gathered, bundled together, tied up, and mislaid'

The contents of Dean Batcheller's desk top in one of those pressing days in August, when two big deals were weighing down the distracted young promoter, and when his little wife lay dying on her bed of pain!

And here—here—here—

Morphy jumped to his feet with a shout. His stenographer opened the outer door.

"Get Mr. Cole on the line!" he cried, waving a folded paper. "I've found the answer! Don't stare, girl—fly!"

"Yes, Mr. Morphy. I've been ringing your bell and came in to see why you didn't answer. Mr. Cole is on your telephone now."

Morphy snatched up the instrument.

"Hello, Mr. Cole!" he said, fighting to control his voice.

The response came in a growl.

"Where the triple-dashed suburbs of Beelzebub have you been, Morphy? I've been waiting an hour!"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Cole. But I was—"

"But you rats! Your infant prodigy Ellison, that you sent up to the city with Dan Ferguson, wires they've made connections with Chittenden. And to-day, Dan met Busch for the first time.

"Who do you suppose Busch is, Morphy? President J. B. A. Busch, of the Hanovarian?"

"I don't know, Mr. Cole."

Morphy fretted impatiently.

"Ever hear of the man who stole the options of the Forty-Four Group from Batcheller?"

"Yes. You mean Clough?"

"I mean Clough. Your brain seems to be clearer. This must be a good day for you, Morphy."

Morphy chuckled, catching his breath.

"It is, Mr. Cole."

"Glad to know it. See if your transcendent genius can appreciate this news, then. Mason Clough, the strong-arm artist who took ten million dollars' worth of oil-property from your poor old Batcheller, is J. B. A. Busch and no other."

"What?"

"Don't yell at me, Morphy! Busch is Clough. Clough is Busch. We've got them both in one man. Whoopee!"

Morphy laughed aloud.

"Don't yell at me, Mr. Cole!" he gasped, dancing a war-dance with the telephone in his hand. "Hold your breath a minute.

"I told you that this was my good day. It is. I've just found something."

He heard a grunt from the other end of the line.

"Humph! Found something, have you? What is it—a new barber?"

"I've found the lost memorandum of agreement between Clough and Batcheller. In a bundle of Dan Ferguson's papers. That's it. What? Hello! Hello! Yes—coming right over. Good-by!"

A smiling June morning, one month later, found Oil King Cole in unusual spirits. While he did not believe in omens he was pleased to note the coincidences of this bright and shining day. Certainly they heightened his anticipation of an appointment which was to bring on the climax of the moldy old grudge against J. B. A. Busch.

For one thing, he had just heard from Manager Gallinger that the field and office

forces of the numerous Cole interests had subscribed one hundred and twenty thousand dollars to the Liberty Loan, and were now engaged in raising a generous contribution to the Red Cross. For another, Gallinger had reported closing a thirty-million-barrel fuel-oil contract, at a fat price, after weeks of jockeying and competition.

Also, Angus Lacey, recently returned from his Eastern pursuit of a mysterious stranger, had spent a few days in the Fullerton & Brea fields and had come back no longer ago than last night to say that the labor troubles there had been peaceably adjusted, and that vital work was once more going forward with its accustomed swing.

Again, Oil King Cole always relished a development where his own intuition was justified and the expert advice of his employees proved wrong; consequently he was particularly happy to note, on top of his morning's pile of field reports, the log of a new well, in territory where Mr. Cole, against the advice of his geologists, had invested heavily, which log contributed to the brightness of the morning by indicating the encounter at a depth of twenty-six hundred feet of most promising oil sand.

Finally, two battered golf-balls lying on his desk served to remind him pleasantly that, on the day previous he had beaten the redoubtable Judge Frederickson himself and forced his way into the semifinals of the annual Tufts' Trophy competition.

Oil King Cole, therefore, was in unusual spirits. He finished dictating the morning's grist of letters, stopped Miss Ambrose as she was rising, contemplated the ceiling for a moment, looked at his watch, and then said, sharply.

"Here, I'll give you a note to Gallinger, please!"

"Yes, Mr. Cole?"

"Mr. Frederick, and so forth and so forth: In effect July 1, please announce a horizontal ten per cent increase in all salaries under your jurisdiction, and have field-superintendents increase wages of their men fifty cents a day flat. Notify auditors and treasurers immediately. Also let me see pay-rolls covering all executive offices of Atlas, Dunbar-Daly, and Grossmont Oil Companies and of Seaboard Pipeline Corporation, for my action. That 'll do, Miss Ambrose—just initial it O. K. C.—what are you smiling about?"

"Excuse me, Mr. Cole. But I couldn't help it. I've been wondering for a month where I'd get a summer hat and—"

"Summer hat?" Oil King Cole roared. "So that's where my money goes—is it? No, don't thank me—thank Gallinger. He loves to be thanked. That's all this morning—that's all!"

Two minutes later the oil king looked up from a report with an abstracted grin.

"God bless my soul!" he chuckled. "It's lucky Mrs. O. K. Cole doesn't know what goes on here—we'd have a car-load of summer hats up at the house in an hour!

"It's all right, though. Have a good mind to buy myself something to celebrate with—socks or suspenders or—well?"

This to an office boy, who announced squeakily that Mr. J. B. A. Busch, president of the Hanovarian Oil Company of San Francisco, was in the waiting-room to keep his appointment.

"Bring him in, son," Mr. Cole said, leaning back to rub his hands. "Here, wait a minute! What are you grinning for?"

The boy crimsoned, tugging at his coat.

"I just heard about—about—Mr Simpson said—why, the raise, you know, Mr. Cole."

"Oh, the raise, eh? Yes, I know. Well, what are you standing there for? Glue on your shoes? Bring Mr. Busch in and don't delay business!"

The boy fled, and Oil King Cole grunted.

"Wonderful difference!" he ejaculated. "Wonderful! Want something done and you have to tell five stenographers and thirteen clerks nine times apiece and wait four hours for it!

"Whisper that's there's money going around and the whole office force knows it in eight seconds by the clock! U-m! Morning, Busch."

President Busch, his pompadour stiffer than ever and his near-sighted eyes puckering in the strong light, came in with dignity and shook hands gravely.

"Good morning, Mr. Cole. You asked me to call. I've made it a point to oblige you, although I'm very busy.

"But let me say, at once, that if it is in regard to the sale of the Hanovarian Oil Company I have changed my mind. The Hanovarian is not for sale, Mr. Cole."

"Sit down, Busch," Cole said, offering a cigar. "Not for sale, eh? I see. Well, I expected this. You came out pretty well in that government suit, I notice."

"Very well, Mr. Cole. At the last minute we found three vital witnesses—"

"Heard about that, too. How much of the old Forty-Four Group have you managed to salvage from the wreck?"

"There was no wreck, Mr. Cole! We were awarded three hundred and eighteen acres."

"Including the old Forbes piece, I understand."

"Including the Forbes claim. In fact, we lost practically nothing of value. But that has nothing to do with my decision not to sell."

"Of course not."

"Of course not, Mr. Cole. The fact is that I'm willing now to buy Hanovarian stock myself. Some plunger has been getting ahead of me, probably planning to hold me up, but if he tries that maneuver—"

"You will come down on him pretty hard, I suppose, Busch? You're a real captain of industry, Busch! I admire you. Tell me more about those three witnesses that you discovered at the eleventh hour."

"What about them, Mr. Cole?"

"I suppose, after they saved your property for you, you did something pretty handsome for them, didn't you?"

"They were paid the usual fees, Mr. Cole. Aside from that—"

"Oh, aside from that you hogged everything in sight, did you? I'm not surprised, Busch. I told you I admire you."

The visitor shifted in his chair. "The Hanovarian company isn't in the habit of giving bonuses to witnesses, Mr. Cole," he said sharply. "They had certain testimony to offer and "

"They offered it, and it didn't cost you a penny! I see. There was old man Petrie—I used to know Petrie in the early days—and Ferguson. I thought people said Ferguson was crazy, Busch."

Mr. Busch laughed shortly.

"Nothing crazy about him!" he ejaculated, tartly. "Clearest witness I ever heard on the stand. Remarkable witness!"

"You are to be congratulated, Busch. But I'm not wasting time with congratulations this morning. I want to talk to you about something else."

His visitor moved forward in his chair.

"I have only a few minutes, Mr. Cole. An appointment at eleven—"

"You'll make it before eleven. Better sit back and rest your spine! There! Mr. Busch, did you ever happen to hear how your San Francisco crowd and their German capitalists stuck me with a doctored option on the Forbes claim, back in 1908 or 1909?"

Busch frowned. "That's a long time ago, Mr. Cole," he began.

"Don't stall. I see you remember it, and even if you didn't, I do. In fact, Busch, one of the best things I do is remember when people play me low-lived, dirty tricks in business.

"I've never forgotten that deal. Lately I've been looking you up some, and I've found that you were in on that jig-sawed option-game.

"You and your gang wanted a California operator to put a price on the Forbes piece as a come-along for your capitalists. You made me the goat and had your laugh that is, if you ever laugh!"

"Business, Mr. Cole, is not a laughing matter with me."

"Oh, all right, then. You cried over it, or patted yourself on the back for it, or bought yourself a nickel's worth of liverwurst to celebrate it, or whatever you do when you're pleased with yourself!

"I'm not going to quarrel with you, Busch, because I'm feeling too good this morning. We'll just start off amicably with the grudge I had against your crowd for that trick. Now I'm going to tell you something

Oil King Cole took four envelopes from a drawer and laid them before his caller. Busch eyed them with a puzzled frown, but said nothing. Mr. Cole cleared his throat.

"Here," he said, taking up the first envelope, "is the option your gang gave me on the Forbes claim. We'll call it Exhibit

A, like the lawyers. And here is a paper I'm going to tell you about first and show you afterward."

He drew out the contents of the second envelope, a single sheet of legal cap, and glanced at it.

"I'm not going to potter away any more time asking questions, Busch, because your capacity for forgetting is too marvelous. I'll just tell you about it, and when I get through we'll take up any little errors I may make.

"In 1909, then, you organized the Hanovarian Oil Company. The property you took over was the Forty-Four Group, and you got your options on it from a man named Mason Clough.

"Oh, you remember Mason Clough today, do you?"

Busch winced a little.

"I remember him—certainly," he said.

"Your memory is improving, Busch. Clough was a mysterious fellow—hadn't been long in the West, wasn't known to many people, and disappeared off the face of the globe soon after he made this Forty-Four Group deal with you.

"Very few people ever saw Clough. You remember that, too, don't you?"

Busch was visibly perturbed. But he answered, steadying his voice with an effort:

"Clough was nothing to me. I did my business with him and lost track of him."

"All right. So did every one else, Busch. So did the man who first gathered together the options on the Forty-Four Group. That man's name was Dean Batcheller."

Cole stopped and eyed his visitor keenly.

"Ever hear that name?"

Busch blinked.

"I don't think—no, I didn't."

"What a liar you are, Mr. Busch!" Cole cried snappishly. "What a clumsy, bungling, miserable liar you are!"

President Busch started forward.

"Now see here, Cole," he rasped, "you'll have to apologize for that sort of language! I'm not here to be—"

"Wait a minute!" Oil King Cole was growing somewhat red in the face himself. "Don't make things any worse than they are! You knew Dean Batcheller, because you knew that Clough robbed him of the options on that Forty Four Group—robbed him as cold-bloodedly as a stick-up man would rob a victim."

"I didn't! What was Batcheller to me? I didn't care where the options came from! And Clough—what was Clough to me?"

"Clough was you!"

"Me?"

Busch sank back in his chair, batting his eyes and stretching his neck as though his collar pinched.

"Clough was—ha-ha-ha! That's inventive, Mr. Cole. I—I—"

"You're Mason Clough a liar and a thief and a scoundrel. No, sit still! My time's valuable, and I'm not going to waste it arguing with you.

"You thought you had got away with it. Batcheller's wife died. The government withdrawal order confiscated the only other land he had, and ruined him

"You never have known how you got away with your bare-faced thievery of that oil-land in the Forty-Four Group, but you didn't care. And now I'm going to tell you why you didn't have to fight for your loot!

"The truth was that Dean Batcheller lost the memorandum of agreement you gave him when you took his options. And it was—lost—for—eight—years."

Cole paused. Busch, staring, began to show relief and to sit up in his place.

"It was lost, eh?" he stammered. "I don't know what you're talking about, but if it was lost—you said it was lost—for eight years?"

The oil king's phrase penetrated slowly. He unfolded the paper he held in his hand, and Busch looked at it with whitening face. He made one effort to brace himself up, but he failed.

"I suppose this is some sort of blackmail game," he said weakly. "Go on."

"Oh, I'm going on, Mr. Busch-Clough, or Clough-Busch, or Deadwood Dick, or Second-Story Sam, or whatever your real name is! I'm going on pretty rapidly now.

"Look at that paper carefully. It was lost for eight years, as I told you."

There was no need for Busch to read the foolscap sheet, nevertheless; he could not keep his eyes from it. It was a typewritten agreement, signed by Dean Batcheller and

Mason Clough, concerning the ownership of certain oil-land options, and was dated at Bakersfield, August 25, 1909.

"Well, what of this?" the visitor said at last, brazenly. "The Hanovarian company has been working on that ground for eight years without any cloud on its title

"The government has just awarded us the right to apply for patent. And Batcheller is gone. What do you get out of this, Mr. Cole? What do you want?"

Oil King Cole laughed.

"Not a penny, Busch—isn't that odd? I'm having about a million dollars' worth of fun and I'm paying off an old score against your gang, and I'm cornering a crooked rat, and money wouldn't tempt me! Now cast your ferret-eyes over this document."

The paper Oil King Cole took from the third envelope on his desk was voluminous, and its covering was indorsed in legal phraseology.

"Batcheller against Clough!" President Busch read, puzzling. "But you can't get away with that, Mr. Cole. Batcheller is gone—you said yourself "

"Oh, dry up, burglar! Save your wind, because you'll need it. This suit is one of three—they're all here, but I'm going to save time by giving you a synopsis of 'em!

"One suit charges the fraudulent acquisition of the Forty-Four Group or something like that and will knock the Hanovarian company's claims into a cocked hat! The second one asks for the dissolution of the Hanovarian company and the appointment of a receiver. Another is a suit against you for your stock.

"And probably by the time you get down to the ground floor of this building the detectives who are waiting will arrest you for forgery, fraud, embezzlement, breach of trust, and one or two other crimes that I've forgotten the names of. But that isn't all, Busch!"

The big man opposite mopped his red forehead and his spiky pompadour with a handkerchief and breathed heavily, but not a word did he speak. So Oil King Cole, picking up his fourth envelope and emptying it, went on coolly:

"You were telling me a while ago that you'd like to buy up the minority stock holdings in the Hanovarian Oil Company. You thought some speculator was cornering the market to hold you up. I'm the speculator.

"Here are thirty-two thousand shares, worth about eighty dollars apiece since the government lost its suit. I bought 'em before your invaluable witnesses—Ferguson and Blaney and Petrie—appeared, and I paid anything from thirty dollars a share down to a song and a poor song at that! Whenever you really want to buy Hanovarian common, think of me!"

Oil King Cole stood up and yawned, making rather a ceremony of the process.

"To put the whole thing in a nut-shell, Busch," he said slowly, "you're through. In a month the Hanovarian Oil Company will be dead and buried and your share in it will belong to the man you cheated out of it.

"And in two months, if you're lucky, you'll be in the penitentiary. I think that is about all for this morning."

He was sliding his stock certificates back into their envelope carelessly. J. B. A. Busch sat watching him, through half-closed eyes. Then suddenly the big crook jumped to his feet.

"Very pretty, Mr. Cole!" he cried roughly. "Very clever work. I see it now—blackmail, with witnesses hidden in the next room, and a cheap bluff that you thought would scare me into compromising!

"But I'm not so easy to scare. When that weak-minded little Batcheller is brought back will be time enough to—"

His jaw dropped. He steadied himself at Mr. Cole's desk. He stared like a sick man who sees Death beyond, at the outer office door.

Through that door, grinning, came crazy old Petroleum Dan Ferguson. Behind him, through the door, smiling broadly, came a thin, white-haired man, who bore somehow the appearance of being far younger than the age stamped on his face.

Behind this stranger came Attorney Eddie Morphy, chuckling

The thin man with the whitened hair stepped forward and faced the shrinking president of the Hanovarian Oil Company.

"Hello, Clough!" he said dryly. "I see you remember me all right."

"Batcheller!"

"Right again. Thanks to old Dan here, God bless him! And to Mr Cole and his attorneys, and young Lacey—"

Busch, or Clough, or whatever his name really was, reddened and clenched his teeth at a sudden snicker from where Oil King Cole stood. He turned that way, knotting his big, soft hands.

"Damn you, anyhow!" he shouted hoarsely. "You're even with me, but now—"

Oil King Cole laughed aloud. With a quick slap he knocked the visitor's hands down and seized him by the shoulders. He wheeled him violently about, and, Busch, struggling, came into crashing collision with a door-edge.

His nose, battered, began to bleed bled over his chin, over his shirt-front, and to the floor, and by the round drops he left he marked his passage from the room. In the grip of Oil King Cole he fought in vain and they were in the outer office and almost at the outer door when it was opened by Angus Lacey.

"Hello!" that exuberant youth exclaimed with delight; "giving a candidate the grand bounce? Here, Mr. Cole, it's my turn that's it—now, Mr. Slickum S. Skinner, up on your toes—fine! And away we go!"

It was some distance to the elevators, at the bottom of which two plain-clothes men waited patiently for an expected passenger, but that distance was made in good order and time, only Mr. Busch—Clough skidding on the turns.

By good fortune one of the cage doors was open -and the cage was empty. Angus lifted a little, increased his speed, and at a nicely calculated moment planted a vigorous kick where it would do the most good—and the visitor from San Francisco sailed gloriously into the far side of the elevator and laid his aching nose on the cold iron.

"Going down!" Angus cried, bringing up short at the door

And the elevator went down.

Angus returned to the office, wiping his hands, his whistled tune accompanied by mournful howls that receded down the shaft. He strolled through the front offices and into the private sanctum of Oil King Cole. That gentleman, perspiring freely, and weak with laughter, was calling for General Manager Gallinger.

Mr. Gallinger came on a trot. Oil King Cole hailed him between gasps.

"The carpet, Fred! Look at the—the carpet, man! Di—didn't I tell you that would come to pass? Blood?

"Buckets of bl-blood! Oh, for the love of truth, somebody un-undo my c-collar. I'm going to h-have a stroke!"


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# "COW HEELS"

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# BUCKING UP RUPERT.

BY OCTAVUS ROY COHEN.

**Rupert Carson Was Unacquainted with His Real Self, So—His Friends Introduced Him.**

CHARLEY SCOTT stepped briskly across the office and paused by the desk of Rupert Carson. For a minute he gazed in commiserating silence at the bent figure of his friend. Then he spoke:

"How about it, Rupert?"

The man in the chair raised his eyes, smiled slightly and deprecatingly shrugged his shoulders.

"Haven't been able to summon the nerve."

"Of all the rot! Since when did it take *nerve* to ask for a raise? 'Specially *you*—who deserve it?"

"It does—right now."

"Trouble with you, Rupert, you've got rubber tubing where your backbone ought to be."

Rupert rose. He was a well set-up young man, broad of shoulder and deep of chest.

"You think I'm afraid of my job, Charley?"

"Yes," bluntly, "I do."

"You guessed right. I am."

"You're afraid of almost everything, aren't you?" queried Scott with the barbed frankness of friendship.

"Pretty nearly, I guess."

"Somebody ought to slam you over the head with a hammer. You're like a clock: you're well enough in your line, but your line is circular. If anything ever happened to you—but I guess that's too much to hope for."

Rupert sighed. "You're right about that. It is."

"Why not walk in on the boss now? Beard the lion in his den. Talk straight out. He likes that—and you know it as well as I. How about it?"

"When I hear you talk, Charley, I almost think I've got the requisite nerve."

Charley Scott gave his companion a playful push toward the harsh, ground-glass door marked "Private."

"Trot along now—and remember: jaw square, shoulders back and fists clenched. You've got to have that raise!"

"And if he says no?"

"He won't. Go to it!"

Bravely, Rupert Carson "went to it." He knocked and entered the owner's office in answer to the terse "Come in." And there his one fine moment of inspired bravery deserted him.

"What is it?" questioned the boss.

Rupert could no more have asked for his raise than he could have flown. The words simply would not come. He had no confidence in his own value to the firm.

"I — er — that order from Hathaway Brothers—" he faltered.

At closing time Charley Scott joined him.

"You got your raise—of course."

Rupert flushed painfully. "No."

"Simpson turned you down?" incredulously.

"No."

"Then—holy suffering mackerel!—you don't mean to say you flunked it?"

"Flat."

Scott snorted. "If we hadn't grown up together, Rupert, I'd leave you stranded. You don't deserve even a friend. You haven't the gumption of an old maid with a wooden leg. Some day you'll catch yourself really doing something that requires initiative—and then you'll simply die of shock."

"I guess I would," assented Rupert. "I reckon I *am* pretty much of a fish."

"A fish?" snapped Charley Scott. "You're a flounder!"

It was true.

Rupert was spineless and he knew it. It was, in fact, his good-natured plea of guilty to the indictment that kept the name of Charley Scott on his narrowing list of friends.

Charley was everything which Rupert was not: aggressive where Rupert was mentally supine; active where Rupert was passive; quick-witted where Rupert had always been notoriously slow of thought.

Perhaps the difference in the two young men lay in the fact that Charley had rubbed elbows with the real workaday world, while Rupert had been carefully nurtured through the years of adolescence by a doting and widowed mother, who had successfully sought to shelter him from anything resembling a hard knock.

Rupert was big and healthy. He rather fancied that he was a bit above normal strength. Of the quality of his stamina he knew nothing.

And then his mother had died and the inferior position with the Simpson Wholesale Dry Goods & Notions Company—which had heretofore been rather a pleasant way of passing the time—became a vital necessity if he would live.

His mother's money had been in the nature of an annuity, the principal of which reverted on her death to the original estate in which Rupert had no interest.

There grew within him a fear for his position. Two years passed and he had not been raised. He knew that he had done his work thoroughly and faithfully.

He was not a shirk.

He was more than a little pained over the fact that Simpson had not raised him without a request. He knew that he could probably get his raise for the asking, but—

*Probably!* There was the rub. He was not absolutely, positively certain, and he was afraid to take the chance. He was afraid to do anything which might alter the established routine of his narrow life.

His cosmic scheme had been arranged by his widowed mother; the mother who had so sheltered him from the uncouth and the bizarre that she had successfully quenched the spark of vital manhood which he had inherited from a two-fisted father, who had died before Rupert's birth.

The following day Charley Scott snorted a disgusted "Good morning," and later in the day paused by his desk for a snarling "I take it back. You ain't even a flounder. You're a *minnow;* a tiny, wiggle-tailed, fresh-water minnow. Something ought to happen to you! Something ought to knock you between the eyes. It might awaken you to the fact that you're a man."

"I almost wish—" sighed Rupert.

"What?"

"That something would—knock me between the eyes!"

And something did!

It happened that very night, and Rupert was not knocked off his feet. Not at first. He didn't have time!

The city in which Rupert Carson had been so gently reared is bounded on the east by the waters of a wide river, the surface of which is studded with a hundred and some-odd tiny islands; a myriad meccas for picnickers and summer-homers.

The vista from the old wharf at the foot of Clay Street is unusually beautiful, and Rupert was blessed—or cursed—with a poetic soul.

The waters were calm, the moon full and bright, and Rupert—as usual—was alone. He walked slowly to the Clay Street wharf, lighted his pipe and, settling comfortably back against a nest of old creosoted piling, gave himself over to idle dreams.

He was familiar with all the details of the scene: the puffing, straining tugs in the channel on the other side of Folly Island; the occasional pert chug-chugging of saucy little motorboats; the rattle of machinery at the great machine shops a quarter of a mile down the river; the lights of the bustling, prosperous city; the ranks of tall chimneys belching their incessant smoke across the face of an eternally genial moon.

It was quiet, peaceful—it soothed and comforted him.

Into the silver moon-path there shot a tiny motorboat, from the bows of which the water curled in two long billows of white foam. The little craft was running smoothly and evenly, and her sharp prow was

headed straight for the Clay Street pier and Rupert!

He let his eyes rest languidly upon it, and suddenly those eyes widened; the big muscles of his fine body stiffened unconsciously. There was but one person in the boat, and that person was undoubtedly waving to him!

Enough to destroy the aplomb of even so sophisticated a young man as Rupert, but even so, it would not have caused a sudden queer feeling at the heart, a sudden palpitation, had not that one person been—a remarkably pretty young woman!

Rupert knew very little about young women.

He knew, of course, that they were necessary to church sociables and to Sunday-school picnics, to charity-fairs and to marriages, but he was quite unused to seeing one of the gentler sex in the rôle of lone-navigator of a speeding motorcraft at an hour shockingly close to midnight.

He was mentally so jarred that he was rendered easily subjective to the events immediately succeeding.

The boat shot in close to the pier under expert guidance, propeller released from the whirling drive-shaft. When it was within a few feet of where he stood—gazing wide-eyed at the vision in dainty voile waist and blue serge skirt—the reverse lever was slammed in, the water churned to a white foam under the boat's torpedo stern and it it slowly lost headway and came to rest immediately beneath him—although the motor continued to send its defiant chug-throb-chug! out across the island-studded river.

The girl met his eyes squarely and spoke clearly: "I am in great trouble. They are coming. I need a man's help quickly. Will you help me?"

"Yes!"

The fatal monosyllable was blurted out before Rupert gave himself a chance to think, even had thought been possible in the face of such bizarre happenings.

"Good! Jump in!" And, as he appeared to hesitate. "Quick!"

He jumped with lithe, agile grace. And almost as his feet touched the bottom boards, the girl drove home the forward speed-lever and the little craft, responding instantly to the mighty urge under her stern, shot channelward.

For several minutes neither spoke. The slight figure of the girl bent tensely above her motor, touching a mysterious something here, and a more mysterious something there. At last she turned to him, her hand still gripping the tiller cord.

"My name is Rosemary Chadwick," she said.

"Mine is Rupert Carson," he found himself answering, although his mind had been given over to a brief wonderment that such a girl as this should be named Rosemary.

He found time in the mental chaos which beset him to realize that it was a very pretty name and therefore thoroughly appropriate to the girl who wore it. He saw that she was speaking again; her voice cool and incisive—albeit, a bit apprehensive.

"I would not have done this had the case not been desperate. You are not afraid to take chances?"

"No."

No other answer was possible. Her next question completely upset what remained to him of poise.

"Have you a revolver?"

"No."

"Take this!"

Something ominously cold and hard was pressed into his palm. He shivered a bit, then closed his fingers about the butt. It seemed to fit there very snugly.

"But do not use it unless you have to," the girl said. "I would prefer that there be no bloodshed."

"Bloodshed? Oh! I say—"

Her eyes flashed to his.

"If you wish to back out—"

"I don't—really. Only things have happened so quickly—you see—I'm a bit stunned."

The ghost of a smile flashed briefly across her lips.

"I'm afraid this is no time for conventions," she said. "Look behind you; do you see that motorboat?"

He craned his neck.

"Yes."

"Well, it is chasing me. At first I thought mine could outrun theirs. Then I

saw they had the legs on me—the speed—and I was in despair. Then I saw *you* on the pier: a *man!* I judged by your flannels that you were of the type—oh! you understand?"

He nodded gravely, and she went on:

"I *must* give them the slip. We will skirt in behind Folly Island and land. Perhaps they will lose us. Then we can cut back to Fairhaven."

"Fairhaven?"

"Yes, I know it's back up the river, but they cut me off. And these papers must get there to-night. Under no circumstances must they be allowed to fall into the hands of those two men.

"That explains the revolver. They would stop at nothing. Don't you understand my desperation now? Don't you see that I dared not land on Folly Island near midnight alone? Are you still willing?"

The long dormant spirit of Rupert's fighting forebears was rising from its sepulcher in the dead past and returning to its own. Swept suddenly from the routine of humdrum existence into a vortex of romantic adventure, Rupert found himself enjoying the thing.

He was a mite nervous, true—for he was only human, and fear is a very human quality, but had he been given his choice at that moment, he would not have backed out. As it was, with the alternative coming from the lips of a very pretty girl who needed him very much—he could do no less than nod affirmatively.

"Can't you speed up that motor a little?" he suggested. "It will give us a better chance to fool them."

She smiled slightly, in wan, worried fashion. "It is doing its d— its best now! They have a faster boat, that's all."

On they sped through the quiet night, the staccato exhaust of the pursuing motor hammering insistently on their ear-drums, louder and louder, as the distance grew less.

The girl glanced apprehensively over her shoulder. Rupert leaned back against the coaming of the cockpit and sighed.

He could not understand the keen relish with which he was facing this bewildering adventure, nor fathom the feeling which caused him to secretly hope that he might have a chance to prove his manhood before the girl who had conscripted his aid.

He found himself suddenly a *new* Rupert Carson, possessed of the manly qualities which he had always admired in others, but had not suspected in himself.

The fact that there was danger, he discounted. The thing was weird enough as it was—on the very outskirts of a large, prosperous, modern city, without adding the super-drama of lethal possibilities.

The girl was desperately in earnest. He allowed his eyes to rest speculatively upon her as she sat tensely in her seat, her right hand toying delicately with the diminutive wheel while her eyes searched the narrow channel between Folly and Shoal Islands, through which they must go, turning now and then on the racing craft astern, which was rapidly lessening the distance between them.

"There are two men in that boat," she said suddenly.

"I have noticed it," answered Rupert, quietly. "Saw 'em when they shot across the path of moonlight."

"You are not afraid?"

"Yes," he answered, frankly, "I am afraid, but I wouldn't back out for anything in the world."

"Thank you—"

"The thanks are all due from my side, Miss Rosemary. I rather fancy I was in need of this sort of—tonic."

"Tonic? This? What do you mean?"

"You wouldn't understand," he told her. "Hadn't you better watch your channel? I notice there are rocks hereabouts."

She swung her eyes bow-ward without another word, and for the next few minutes gave a thrilling exhibition of expert boat-handling as, without slackening speed, she threaded her way through the narrow, tortuous channel.

The channel was dark, illumined only by a running light on their bow—a light somewhat similar to an automobile's spotlight which is usually affixed to the wind-shield.

The giant oaks on the close-lying islands mounted skyward in grim silhouette.

Far ahead lay a maze of smaller islands, heavily wooded, exotic of appearance in the silver glow of the summer moon.